



General Assembly

Sixty-first session

15th plenary meeting

Thursday, 21 September 2006, 3 p.m.
New York

Official Records

President: Ms. Al-Khalifa (Bahrain)

The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

Address by Mr. Ahmed Abdallah Sambi, President of the Union of the Comoros

The President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Union of the Comoros.

Mr. Ahmed Abdallah Sambi, President of the Union of the Comoros, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Ahmed Abdallah Sambi, President of the Union of the Comoros, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Sambi (*spoke in French*): Allow me, first of all, on behalf of the people of the Comoros, my Government and in my personal capacity, to sincerely congratulate you, Madam President, on your election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its sixty-first session. I am convinced that your eminent qualities will enable you to skilfully guide the work of this General Assembly. And I assure you of my readiness to work with you towards the successful accomplishment of the difficult mission entrusted to you by our General Assembly.

I take advantage of this opportunity to address our Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, and to express my deepest gratitude for the total and resolute commitment that he has always shown as head of our Organization, in particular, in the promotion of its

ideals. We are all aware of the immeasurable efforts that he consistently deploys to defend the noble causes of our institution — the fight against poverty, the maintenance of peace in the world, to list but the main ones.

It is a great honour to take the floor today and to address this Assembly in my capacity as the newly elected President of the Union of the Comoros.

Allow me, therefore, at this historic time, to address my deep gratitude to all of the brother countries, to the United Nations system and to the African Union, in particular, for having become engaged in order to ensure that, for the first time, a democratic and peaceful political transition was able to take place in my country following free and transparent elections. That was indeed a first in the Comoros in 30 years of independence.

At this junction, I would like to underline the principal role played by the Republic of South Africa and by its President, Mr. Thabo Mbeki, in monitoring the electoral operations during the last presidential elections held in the Comoros. These elections are an exemplary model for Africa, in spite of certain imperfections.

I wish to convey to the Government and to the brethren people of the Republic of South Africa the sincere gratitude of the people of the Comoros and my personal acknowledgment for the unfailing support that they provided to the process of national reconciliation in the Comoros.

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the interpretation of speeches delivered in the other languages. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room C-154A. Corrections will be issued after the end of the session in a consolidated corrigendum.



I wish to convey to France, a country with which we have long-standing relations, the gratitude of the people and the Government of the Comoros for the constant support that it continues to provide to our country. We are convinced that France, the home country of human rights and freedoms, will meet the request of my Government to ensure that together we can guarantee a harmonious development in the Comoros, with democracy, the rule of law and good governance.

The People's Republic of China also deserves our deep admiration. With great vigour, this brother country has supported the development of the Comoros, ever since we gained independence more than 30 years ago. Through the quality of its relations, China has earned the friendship of all the people of the Comoros, and I remain convinced that it will continue to provide aid and support for my country's socio-economic development, a matter which remains a priority for my Government.

The Republic of Mauritius deserves a special mention for its invaluable support to my country throughout the national reconciliation process. By hosting the donor conference for the Comoros in December 2005, this brother country has demonstrated its great solidarity with the Comoros. We therefore express to it our deep appreciation here today.

Madagascar is a country with which we enjoy, over and above formal cooperation, very close relations by virtue of good neighbourliness, blood ties, a shared language and commerce, and it will remain a crucial partner for us. Madagascar has consistently demonstrated the importance of preserving common values, in particular through closer ties. I know that with this brother country we still have a long way to travel together, as our destinies are linked.

From this platform, I would be remiss not to convey our sincere gratitude to all other bilateral and multilateral partners of the Comoros, in particular, the League of Arab States, the International Organization of la Francophonie and the European Union, which, through the African Union, has provided valuable support and assistance in recent years in the context of the national reconciliation process.

I would like to thank sincerely the entire international community for the spirit of solidarity often expressed towards my country. Moreover, I remain convinced that the entire international

community will continue to support the Comoros to help it complete national reconciliation. This is the sine qua non to ensure that a period of peace and political stability can take root in my country.

The people of the Comoros hope to see an end to the hellish cycle of coups d'état that have spoiled their daily lives over the past three decades. Since my election as President, my Government and I have strived to find the ways and means to promote social and economic development. We are aware of the need to diversify our cooperation abroad and to create conditions that are propitious to investment. On the domestic level, my Government is resolutely committed to fighting corruption and the embezzlement of public funds, to reestablishing an independent and equitable judiciary and we are committed to improving public housing. In order to achieve these goals, we require the backing of our partners in support of our own efforts. That is why I make a solemn appeal to this Organization and to its Members to provide diverse forms of aid in order to ensure the success of this task.

I would be remiss if I did not also touch on the major global issues that we face. The situation in the Middle East remains critical. The conflict that occurred in Lebanon between Israel and Hezbollah deeply hurt us in our flesh and in our hearts. Once again, we question the grounds for waging that war, the reasons for the destruction of economic infrastructure in that brother country, and finally the loss of thousands of lives. My country deeply deplores the shedding of innocent blood in Lebanon and in the Middle East. Why is there so much violence? Why is there so much suffering? Why is there so much inhumanity?

What is there to say about the situation in Palestine where the same scenario persists with its toll of martyrs, children and women who are victims of blind bombing? It is high time for the international community, working within the framework of the United Nations, to respond and to put an end to that conflict by ensuring that a negotiated solution is reached promptly.

We have the right to ask why the situation in Iraq remains catastrophic. It would be a shameful lie to say that we do not awake each day, learning of a growing number of deaths in each community in Iraq.

In Africa, even though some conflicts have been settled, instability and the risk of war and the threat of

war still persist in Chad, the Darfur region of the Sudan, Côte d'Ivoire, Eritrea, Ethiopia and Somalia, just to mention some instances.

The question of Moroccan Sahara in no way leaves us indifferent. It is high time that the international community uses the prestige of the United Nations to expedite a solution based on law to that long-standing dispute. In any such situation, only the application of international law can guarantee the restoration of legality.

Asia is not spared its share of armed conflicts, for example those in Sri Lanka, Timor and southern Philippines. To mention all such conflicts would be tedious. Wherever or whenever war takes place, armed conflict inevitably results in millions of displaced persons, destroyed economic infrastructure and irreversible human, social and economic tragedy and damage. We must acknowledge and appreciate the vast effort of the international community to ensure that dialogue, discussion and negotiation prevail over force, destruction and war. Our Organization plays a major role in this respect. We must acknowledge that the crucial missions undertaken by the United Nations are irreplaceable.

We live in a time of paradoxes. On the one hand, we are living through an exceptional period marked by extraordinary growth of knowledge and know-how in the areas of technology, science, economic output, information technology and communications, just to mention a few. Yet on the other hand, we continue to devote almost unlimited financial and technical resources to producing more and more weapons capable of destroying our planet. Our countries are caught up in an arms race, instead of concentrating on development and combating disease and poverty.

At a time when science makes possible considerable progress, as I said earlier, the contradiction persists at the start of the twenty-first century that millions of individuals do not have enough to eat, millions of persons are totally destitute, and too often abject poverty, famine and devastating pandemics prevail. Many families live without shelter or in precarious and unhealthy conditions. Side by side with an increasingly prosperous world, more and more people live in increasingly difficult situations. We must ask ourselves how to overcome these contradictions in order to meet the challenges of the future.

Without going into detail, I wish to touch on the root causes of these problems, their consequences and prospects for the future. In my humble opinion, the reasons for these conditions are twofold. The first concerns governance in countries themselves. It will not surprise you to hear that in many countries, especially in the poorest countries, there is injustice, corruption and a lack of respect for fundamental human rights. The second point concerns international governance and all the related problems. While we live in a globalized world, we must recognize that degradation of the environment from uncontrolled pollution by business motivated by easy profit endangers the lives of future generations. In economic terms, we stand by powerless, witnessing deteriorating terms of trade, which plunge the poorest countries into ever-deepening poverty while the richest countries continue increasingly to prosper.

We believe that in order to achieve peace among men, to seek peace among countries and to ensure lasting peace for each and every one, we must prevent and resolve the conflicts and ills that beset our world. We meet in this forum to seek — and to find — solutions to the problems that I have touched upon in my statement. The permanent quest for material and social well-being should guide us towards a guarantee of better lives for our children. We must attack the root causes of the conflicts breaking out everywhere in the world. It is crucial that we combat pandemics such as AIDS, which has destroyed millions of people worldwide.

Mr. Majoor (Netherlands), Vice-President, took the Chair.

Finally, I wish to use the words of Saint Francis of Assisi who said, "Give us love, my God, so that we might instil it where the forces of evil dominate". May God the almighty and most merciful inspire our decisions to ensure that a time of peace comes upon us and that we see an end to the spilling of the innocent blood of people in countries at war.

(spoke in Arabic)

The Union of the Comoros has entered into a new period since my accession to the post of head of the supreme Council following the free and transparent elections that were held in May and June. We hope to strengthen our ties with all friendly countries on the basis of mutual respect and common interests. We reaffirm our firm commitment to all international

conventions and agreements that seek to ensure peace, well being, security and development for all peoples of the world.

The Comoros occupies a distinct strategic position and embraces many civilizations. In spite of the challenges it faces, the Comoros has managed to preserve its African and Arab identities, and its affiliation with Islam: a religion of love, amity, tolerance and peace.

Our country is among the world's poorest, in spite of the priceless natural resources that we enjoy, such as agriculture, fishing and tourism, in addition to our strategic position in the Mozambique Channel. Incorrect economic policies applied since we gained independence in 1975 and political instability have been among the negative factors that made our country especially poor and backward. Average gross domestic product per capita stands at about \$300 per year.

We have therefore developed a far-reaching plan seeking to provide substantial shelter for our population, in place of straw huts. We have sought to establish an independent judiciary in order to ensure the justice and equality of all before the law, and we are combating unemployment and poverty. If we are unable to provide decent and dignified housing and unable to guarantee a minimum of justice, then we will be unable to fight unemployment and poverty.

I would like once again to call upon the international community to continue to provide aid and assistance to my country. I assure members all that their generosity and assistance will reach secure hands and will be used properly and appropriately.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Union of the Comoros for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Ahmed Abdallah Sambi, President of the Union of the Comoros, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mr. Abdoulaye Wade, President of the Republic of Senegal

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Republic of Senegal.

Mr. Abdoulaye Wade, President of the Republic of Senegal, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Abdoulaye Wade, President of the Republic of Senegal, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Wade (*spoke in French*): Senegal and the Kingdom of Bahrain have had cordial relations of friendship, which have been enhanced and strengthened by reciprocal confidence and esteem. I am therefore pleased that Ms. Haya Rashed al-Khalifa is presiding over the General Assembly at its sixty-first session, during a key time in the history of our organization. Her election was an act of faith in the ideals of the United Nations and a message of hope for peoples who dream of a fairer, more equitable and more welcoming world for all. I offer her my warmest congratulations and assure her of the full cooperation of the Senegalese delegation as she carries out her high responsibilities in the service of the international community.

I would also like to convey to the Secretary-General a fraternal message of my greatest appreciation and gratitude for the ability and effectiveness with which he has always acted, enabling our Organization to better adapt to the requirements of the new millennium. At a time when he is preparing to leave his high post after 10 years of loyal and good service, it is with a sincere sense of pride that I say to him as an African compatriot, "Mr. Secretary-General, mission accomplished".

Last year, in this very Hall, we renewed our commitment to meet the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015. To be sure, since that time, some praiseworthy initiatives have occurred along the way, especially with measures to erase the multilateral debt of 18 least developed countries (LDCs) and to establish a levy on air tickets as a source of financing for development. I salute the efforts made by President Jacques Chirac of France and by President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva of Brazil for their promotion of this innovative mechanism to mobilize resources.

The problem of debt, however, in particular the debt of our continent, remains a hindrance to our development. In reality, the first question we should be asking ourselves, and which we do ask in Africa,

regards the evaluation of the debt: to take a look at the overindebtedness of Africa, to see exactly how much we owe, because it turns out that some countries are paying more than they owe. This is why I have long been advocating an x-ray of African debt to see how our countries have ended up in a situation whereby they devote much of their export earnings to paying off debt, contracted sometimes in dubious circumstances, to the detriment of their economic and social development programmes. The vicious circle of debt, compounded by unfair imbalances in international trade owing to agricultural subsidies in wealthy industrialized countries, has been particularly harmful for our farmers.

The failure of the agriculture negotiations in the Doha round, which is still fresh in our memory, shows how far we have yet to go in order to ensure respect by all for the rules of the game, so that world trade can be equally profitable for the giants of agro-business as for the small-scale cotton growers of Senegal, Benin, Burkina Faso and Mali, or for the small-scale coffee planters from Uganda, Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire. We say yes to free trade, but it must be fair and equitable.

The dizzying increase in the price of oil and its by-products since 2003 constitutes a new source of concern for non-producer countries. If the current trend continues, many countries will see their years of economic and social development efforts wiped out by the cost of oil. It will then be pointless to expound on the Millennium Development Goals on schooling, universal health care, access to drinking water for all, the fight against unemployment and the eradication of poverty.

In Africa, we have decided to take up the challenge by gathering together, on the initiative of Senegal, in the Association of Non-Oil Producing African Countries, in order to promote the development of bio-fuels. This green version of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) has already been launched. With its vast cultivatable lands and enormous fresh water resources, Africa has, without a doubt, incomparable advantages in this sphere, and could even aspire to become the world's premier bio-fuel producer.

I would call upon all interested parties to join with us in this new green energy revolution, especially since it respects our environment and is in perfect harmony with the objectives of the United Nations

Framework Convention on Climate Change and its Kyoto Protocol. Let us be optimistic in thinking that our planet will be a healthier place in the interest of all peoples, thanks to a civilization based on clean energy.

Turning to the situation in Africa, Senegal welcomes the progress made in democracy on the continent, as well as the significant progress achieved in the peaceful settlement of disputes. Such positive developments, however, have been thwarted by the persistence of some hotbeds of tension. In the Sudan, we hope and work for the expansion of the camp of peace, so that those protagonists who have thus far been left out of the peace process can sign the Abuja Agreement for a settlement of the Darfur crisis.

Yesterday, here in New York, the Peace and Security Council of the African Union addressed the issue of Darfur and emphasized that Africa must offer more efforts, more sacrifices and more commitment, but that it can find a solution only within the framework of close cooperation with the United Nations, for which it must indicate its readiness.

Turning to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Senegal welcomes the holding of elections last July. We hope that, whatever the outcome of the second round of presidential elections on 30 October, a reconciled Congolese people will work in the spirit of unity to utilize the tremendous potential of their country for peace, national unity and economic and social progress.

To my Ivorian brothers and sisters I would like to solemnly state that the need for a Côte d'Ivoire, healed of its wounds for good, has become most urgent — as much for themselves as for all of us in the subregion. I would thus urge Ivorian leaders of all ideologies to show that they can get beyond their differences to foster a return to lasting peace, more in accordance with the history of that brother country and with its proper destiny within the West African family and within our continent.

With regard to the Digital Solidarity Fund, which I proposed in December 2003 at the World Summit in the Information Society, as information technology and communications coordinator of The New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), I am pleased to report that we have had satisfactory results. Since being launched in March 2005 with the support of nearly all Members of the United Nations, the Fund has gained the formal support of the People's Republic of

China. I would like warmly to thank the Chinese authorities for their support, which surely bolsters the Fund's universal nature. I request all States that have not yet done so to formalize their previously voiced commitment to the Fund by sending a letter to the Executive Secretary of the Fund in Geneva. I would recall that cities too can become members. I take this opportunity also to recall that the Digital Solidarity Fund is supported exclusively through voluntary public and private contributions, the amount of which is up to member States, cities or local governments.

We would suggest that countries commit themselves to the so-called Geneva Principle, which consists of, including in calls for bids in the digital technology field, a contribution to the Fund of 1 per cent of the value of the goods and services linked to information and communications technology. Fund resources are managed in strict transparency through the Foundation Council with a tripartite membership: local authorities, private enterprise and civil society.

The General Assembly's recent High-Level Dialogue on International Migration and Development shows the extent to which we must continue our joint efforts to address an extremely relevant and complex problem which will be with us for a long time to come. International migration has always been a part of the history of peoples. What is new is the current scope and form of illegal immigration. For a wide variety of reasons, with North-South imbalances not the least of them, illegal migration necessitates an approach of joint partnership instead of unilateral solutions.

In Senegal, we have already decided to resolutely combat this phenomenon by strengthening the surveillance of our coasts with the support of our European partners. We have already signed an agreement with Spain, and we shall sign a similar agreement with France next week. The purpose of these agreements is to regulate migratory flows to developed countries, thereby combating illegal migration. The smugglers, largely responsible for this, are constantly being hunted down and punished in accordance with the law.

Along with the dismantling of clandestine networks, we have launched our Return to Agriculture programme, through which we are setting up rural farms in order to enable our young people to engage in modern agriculture and animal husbandry. This will give them reasons to stay at home and avoid tragic

ventures which often end at the bottom of the sea or in the desert. That is how we implement the principle we have adopted in Senegal: zero illegal emigration.

The year 2006 marks a decisive turning point in the history of the United Nations, with reforms under way to adapt to changing world realities. These include the establishment of the Human Rights Council and the Peacebuilding Commission, which I hope will allow for enhanced promotion of human rights and more effective management of post-conflict periods.

As for Security Council reform, Senegal deplors the deadlock in the negotiations, which is to the detriment of regions such as ours. Africa, while it is the focal point of the Council's agenda, does not have a single permanent seat. That is a historical injustice which must be corrected as soon as possible by granting Africa a seat, with the right to veto, apart from the overall reform package.

The Palestinian people, too, are victims of injustice, depriving them of a legitimate right to a viable, free and independent State. History teaches us that war, despite its long list of innocent victims and the toll it takes on civilian infrastructure — bitter experiences recently relived by the peoples of Lebanon and Palestine — will never overcome a people's will if it aspires to take its rightful place in the community of free nations. The right to freedom and independence is part of the destiny of peoples. Its attainment can be delayed by historic circumstances, but destiny will always be achieved. It is better to understand this in time than to regret it too late.

As Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, Senegal will continue to ensure that the Organization continues its efforts towards a negotiated, just and lasting solution to the Middle East conflict so that all of the suffering peoples of the region can finally live in peaceful coexistence.

With regard to Iran, the Assembly is aware of my position. There should be dialogue without prior conditions, meaning that the protagonists should sit down around a negotiating table.

Senegal has always acted in the service of peace and continues to do so more than ever before at a time when we face such major challenges.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Republic of Senegal for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Abdoulaye Wade, President of the Republic of Senegal, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mr. Valdas Adamkus, President of the Republic of Lithuania

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Republic of Lithuania.

Mr. Valdas Adamkus, President of the Republic of Lithuania, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Valdas Adamkus, President of the Republic of Lithuania, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Adamkus: The previous session of the General Assembly created high expectations for reform and comprehensive renewal that would ensure the continued success and relevance of the United Nations well into the twenty-first century. Thanks to the initiatives launched by the Secretary-General, today we have the Peacebuilding Commission; the Central Emergency Response Fund; the recognition of a collective responsibility to protect, where a State fails to protect its citizens from genocide and crimes against humanity; and a new Human Rights Council. Lithuania is committed to work to ensure that the new Human Rights Council can strengthen the protection and promotion of human rights around the world.

It is said that State-building is a long and difficult process. That is precisely why United Nations assistance in this area is much needed. The Peacebuilding Commission brings renewed hope that post-conflict countries can avoid slipping back into chaos. But institutions alone do not count if they are not supported by political will. Strong international commitment is necessary in offering hope of a better life wherever nations are struggling to get back on their feet.

Lithuania's lead in a Provincial Reconstruction Team in Afghanistan has given us first-hand understanding of the vital importance of the

sustainability and continuity of such efforts. However, whether in Afghanistan or elsewhere, our efforts will be successful only to the extent that the nations themselves are fully engaged in post-conflict State-building and rational, market-sound economic development. Today, we welcome an increasing Afghan capacity to rebuild the country, and we are encouraged by the expansion of the International Security Assistance Force area of responsibility. On the other hand, the challenges ahead will require ever-increasing focus and further efforts on the ground.

The tragic events in the Middle East over the past 12 months have vividly demonstrated the human and financial costs of inability to reach compromises and final solutions regarding problems that have divided societies and poisoned the region for long years. Thus, the effective promotion of a comprehensive peace plan in the Middle East is topical as never before. Security Council resolution 1701 (2006) and major donor conferences offer hope for the development of a sovereign and strong Lebanon. Let us make this a reality by pooling our efforts and contributing to this cause today, not tomorrow. The two States of Israel and Palestine living side by side in peace is our goal.

Few security issues are as dramatic as terrorism, with its indiscriminate targeting of civilian lives in an ever-expanding geography. Five years ago, the people of this very city suffered a brutal and cold-blooded attack on the values of humanity and tolerance that forever changed the world as we knew it. It is therefore essential that we unite our efforts to ensure that this never happens again. We welcome the Assembly's adoption of the United Nations Global Anti-Terrorism Strategy (resolution 60/288), and we call for the completion of work on a comprehensive convention on international terrorism as soon as possible and for its being put into practice.

To succeed in our fight against terrorism, we must not yield to fears that separate; instead, we must build on our common humanity. We therefore hope the Alliance of Civilizations will become an integral part of our interaction, promoting solidarity, inclusion and understanding and reinforcing the values and principles which extremists seek to undermine.

Furthermore, we should redouble our efforts to tackle the issue of disarmament and non-proliferation. As we celebrate the 50th anniversary of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the

challenges to non-proliferation continue to mount. Lithuania strongly supports the strengthening of the effectiveness and efficiency of the IAEA Safeguards System. Compliance with the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and the relevant Security Council resolutions is a key to global security. We therefore call on all States to exercise full compliance in this area, vital to our common peace and security.

At the same time, security, as it is typically defined, has a broader meaning now. We should deal with climate change, energy security and dire water or food shortages with equal attention.

We must be firm in our common fight against terrorism, but we must be just as firm in fighting poverty and upholding the dignity of the individual. We need to put the available resources to the best possible use, such as ensuring significant progress in the implementation of the internationally agreed upon Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Lithuania is proud to follow up on these commitments. As a new donor country, we know that it will take time to measure up to the high expectations in the field. We provide increasing amounts of advice and assistance, in more and more places. Over the past year alone, our development aid has grown by 60 per cent. We are determined to further increase our aid and diversify its geography. We remember what it meant to receive help when we needed it, and we know and accept the responsibility to now help others in our turn.

Only a comprehensive approach can ensure that the inextricable link between security, development, and human rights that we all agreed on will translate into a real and positive impact on the lives of countless millions of human beings around the world.

As we pursue the commitments already undertaken, we must look beyond tomorrow to be able to empower the United Nations to deal successfully with the challenging diversity of issues and concerns of all our nations.

It is natural that in debating such vital issues as the reform of the United Nations, we, the Member States, have disagreements. However, we should also remember that, while we discuss our disagreements here in New York, millions of the poorest are suffering from degrading starvation, millions of children are dying from preventable diseases, and millions of people have nothing to rely on but the United Nations

to protect them. If we want the United Nations to effectively deal with development challenges, counter new deadly threats and restore the value of human life to countless people around the world, an ongoing change is a must.

I therefore urge the United Nations to continue in the vital areas of management reform and mandates review in order to increase the Organization's efficiency and effectiveness for the benefit of all.

We also urge strengthening of international environmental governance and translating the World Summit agreement on the collective responsibility to protect into a willingness to act, when such action is needed, and ending impunity for the most serious crimes of concern to the international community.

A vital element of the United Nations renewal is the issue of Security Council reform. Lithuania has consistently supported reform, in terms of both membership and working methods. Enhancing the Council's legitimacy through such reform will enable it to improve the discharge of its primary responsibilities vis-à-vis international peace and security.

A renewed Security Council should give adequate voice and representation to all regions. As a member of the East European Group, Lithuania believes that this Group, too, deserves better representation on the future Security Council. Our collective experience of dramatic and peaceful transformation of our societies has a lot to offer. In this respect, we believe, our Group can offer an excellent candidate for the post of Secretary-General.

Despite its flaws, the United Nations remains the only organization with the potential to embody a truly global and effective spirit of multilateralism. Therefore, whatever we do, we should continue to ask ourselves: are we, the Member States, doing enough to help the United Nations fulfil its promise to mankind? We are a world family and we have responsibilities to one another.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Republic of Lithuania for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Valdas Adamkus, President of the Republic of Lithuania, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Agenda item 8 (continued)

General debate

Address by Mr. Albert Pintat, Head of Government of the Principality of Andorra

The Acting President. The Assembly will now hear an address by the Head of Government of the Principality of Andorra.

Mr. Albert Pintat, Head of Government of the Principality of Andorra, was escorted to the rostrum.

The Acting President: I have great pleasure in welcoming His Excellency Mr. Albert Pintat, Head of Government of the Principality of Andorra, and inviting him to address the General Assembly.

Mr. Pintat (Andorra) (*spoke in Catalan: English text provided by the delegation*): A decade ago, it was said that with the end of the cold war we had reached the "end of history." Over the years, this view has been largely discredited.

Much of the world, especially the West, paid scant attention to the sense of injustice shared by many peoples and communities around the world. What we have witnessed, with a mixture of horror, sympathy and unease over the last 10 years, has been the return of history. The fall of the Twin Towers, the wars in Afghanistan, Iraq and Lebanon and the terrorist attacks in London and Madrid have shaken the foundations of the secular State. These events have been said to represent a "clash of civilizations," but I reject the reductive, indeed, misleading division between North and South, East and West, and Christians and Muslims.

The greatest achievements in the West were the result of a complex process of cultural exchange between East and West. The free trade of ideas fostered innovation and advances in understanding. We must therefore reject this notion of a mentality that conceives an essential clash between "us" and "them". I believe that we are living through a turbulent and bloody struggle between, on the one hand, the forces of extremism, present in both the East and the West, and, on the other hand, secular tolerance, also fortunately manifested everywhere on Earth.

Andorra is an old country whose borders have remained unchanged since 1278. Our history is one of survival. We were in existence when the Cathars fled

the might of the first Crusade to seek refuge in our mountain pastures. We survived the French Revolution, the Spanish Civil War and the Second World War. History has taught us that power demands restraint. And our own experiences have taught us — and the past few weeks have reinforced this costly lesson — that displays of military might, intended to shock and awe, cannot, by themselves, bring about the desired result.

Is it not paradoxical that at this moment, when the need for civilized discussion between people is greater than ever, this venerable institution is deemed inconsequential? We need, of course, to continue the process of its reform. As an idea, however, this place embodies all of our hopes. As a humanitarian agency with a host of vital social programmes, the United Nations does inestimable work. As a forum for rational discourse committed to reaching global understanding, its work is absolutely necessary. This should be the forum in which we try to understand and correctly interpret the crossroads at which we find ourselves. The United Nations signifies the world's moral conscience — the principle of equality and solidarity and the protection of human rights and human dignity. It marks the path to development.

Violence and the rise of religious extremism have roiled the globe. We all are prey to the unease felt over the future of the secular State. In one sense, however, the very idea of the nation-State lies at the heart of many of our problems. It encourages us to believe in the rhetoric of "us" against "them", in exclusive identities and in outdated ethnocentric discourse. It obfuscates the growing division between rich and poor that transcends countries, nations, and continents. It neglects the fact that most people on this planet seek only that which will permit them to live in a dignified manner and be happy in their lives.

Indeed, many States, especially those whose boundaries reflect a legacy of colonialism, are constituted without regard to the religious or ethnic backgrounds of their inhabitants. The civil wars that are currently tearing apart some countries are but one example of the enormous difficulties presented by the artificial construction of such States.

We must not forget that, historically, the West has never been a good example in terms of religious tolerance. On the contrary, one might cite the twelfth-century expulsion of the Jews from England or recall

the forced conversion of Muslims after the fall of Granada in 1492, the Inquisition, or the persecution of the Protestant Huguenots who fled France during the sixteenth century. Yet in the East — in Jerusalem or Tehran, for example — Muslims, Jews and Christians coexisted into the early twentieth century. Those great cosmopolitan centres flourished in an atmosphere of genuine religious tolerance.

The original meaning of the term secular described those religious orders that looked outwards to the world at large. In the sixteenth century a new notion of tolerance signified a willingness to accept different Protestant sects in towns and cities in Northern Europe. But our modern-day understanding of tolerance, in which people of all religions can live together, required centuries. Curiously, this version of history has been forgotten by those who see secularism as being opposed to belief. The notion of secularism has never been oppositional to religion but rather denotes a mentality willing to contemplate uncertainty and imperfect knowledge. It does not confuse questions of faith with scientific questions or seek to disarm the individual's liberty of conscience.

Secularism, therefore, recognizes the shared fallibility of the human race. Religious faith can be taught, but it cannot be imposed. It cannot lead to violence and has to coexist with the secular state. Our common humanity requires us to respect each other through our diversity.

The genius of tolerance lies in the ability to listen — to truly listen and attempt to understand. To listen and learn is not an act of weakness. Indeed, it is the extremist's display of strength or desire for revenge that represents a fatal weakness. Again and again, in the course of history, we see that a mighty spirit precedes a fall. Recently we have stood by and witnessed in dismay the catastrophic results that ensue from the deployment of military might against determined guerrilla warfare.

Most of today's ills have their roots in old and unresolved problems, but the rhetoric of violence which surrounds us polarizes us even further, undermines the possibility of finding a lasting solution and widens the lines of fracture. We have to think of ourselves as a single global community where we are all interdependent.

In the Middle East, we recognize the need for Israel's security, as we recognize the need for Palestine to become a viable State.

Andorra is located in a part of the world which has always been a place where different cultures have met and lived in shared prosperity: the Mediterranean. Today, this has become a new frontier full of tension. As Europeans, we must seek to revitalize the area, recalling its ancient history as a home to many civilizations and their corresponding values — from Rome to Byzantium and from Athens to Tangiers.

Andorra, like many small countries, long relied on its isolation for its survival. But in our global world, mountains can no longer protect us. International concerns press upon us. Today's world is heterogeneous, imperfect and lacking in a common vision: there are no easy solutions, and questions cannot be viewed in monochrome. The Millennium goals that we debated here with such hope are in danger of receding into distant memory. Is this the fault of the United Nations? Let us not turn our backs on the masses, who are tired of suffering, and who see the United Nations as being their only hope. We must allow their voices to be heard and welcome them into the global community. The time has come for us to act on our promises.

We must recognize that collectively we are the United Nations. We represent humanity as a whole. We are betraying it if we do not seek to make the United Nations a more robust and efficient machine. If we continue blindly, caring only for our national self-interest, we betray its trust. Multilateralism, which we as a group embody in this Hall, is the path that will lead to many of the solutions. The plight of the unfortunate should not fall on deaf ears. We should join together to solidify democratic institutions and processes, and in so doing fight against poverty, war, disease, illiteracy and corruption. That should be our common cause. It is only through this joint effort that we will be able to raise our approach to a collectively ethical and morally correct level.

When people do not have enough to eat and when they are deprived of essential freedoms and justice, there is only one option left open to them: to seek a better life by whatever means they can, leaving behind their native lands. We are currently witnessing mass migration from the poorest parts of the world to the richer; all too often, the journey is tragically cut short

on the high seas. This weighs heavily on our conscience. Erecting barriers to prevent this process will never work: their desperation is too great. Millions of human beings are orphaned from their homelands — we should have solutions to offer them. There is no place where this issue is more pressing than sub-Saharan Africa. The high risk of death does not impede people from attempting to reach the shores of Europe, simply because their lives at home have become unbearable.

We require a concerted and global plan for migration. This can be achieved only if we act together through the United Nations to provide the human and material resources necessary to step-up to the challenge. In so doing we will better the lives of millions of people who, quite justifiably, feel cruelly disenfranchised from the human family. As the writer Juan Goytisolo put it, "The world provides a home for those who are homeless". The United Nations should certainly be their refuge.

In line with this, Andorra stands ready to underline its commitment to the United Nations system and to development as a whole. Two days ago here in New York, we signed an agreement with UNICEF to provide €1 million in financing over a five-year period to help children suffering from HIV/AIDS in Cameroon. Civil society in our small country is also playing its part; the Andorran National Committee for UNICEF will contribute €500,000 to this project over the same period.

It is true that our world today is a dangerous place. But there is still immense hope, and this spurs us on. There is no definitive answer to the problems that our societies face, and it has been said that our lives as human beings cannot be perfected. We have a duty, however, to continually ask questions and to have the courage to overcome the problems of our age.

Our ideas are the greatest advantage that we have; they are the motors of progress. For us, this means democracy, shared prosperity, tolerance, the rule of law, respect for human rights and the pursuit of freedom through the defence of fundamental human liberties. Those are the best weapons we have to fight absolutism and inequality. It is here at the United Nations that our voices should be heard and here that we should be able to defend those principles.

Finally, I should like to express our gratitude to the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, for his great

work over the past 10 long and complicated years. We salute and congratulate him for all that he has done to maintain and apply the principles enshrined in the Charter. I speak for all Andorrans in expressing my esteem for him and his great efforts.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the Head of Government of the Principality of Andorra for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Albert Pintat, Head of Government of the Principality of Andorra, was escorted from the rostrum.

Address by His Excellency The Right Honourable Pakalitha Bethuel Mosisili, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Lesotho

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Lesotho.

His Excellency The Right Honourable Pakalitha Bethuel Mosisili, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Lesotho, was escorted to the rostrum.

The Acting President: I have great pleasure in welcoming His Excellency The Right Honourable Pakalitha Bethuel Mosisili, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Lesotho, and inviting him to address the General Assembly.

Mr. Mosisili (Lesotho): My delegation associates itself with the compliments extended to Ms. Haya Rashed Al-Khalifa, on her election to the presidency of the General Assembly, to her predecessor, His Excellency Mr. Jan Eliasson, and to the Secretary-General. It would be remiss of us if we did not express our delight at the fact that our proceedings are being led by a lady President this year.

We meet in the aftermath of the worst conflict in the Middle East. This conflict has brought untold misery and has resulted in unnecessary loss of life, displacement of people and wanton destruction of property. In the midst of all this, the Security Council remained pitifully helpless.

The delay by the Security Council in reacting to the Israel-Lebanon conflict graphically demonstrated the Council's extreme inadequacy in responding urgently, with prompt and decisive action, to international armed conflicts. It is precisely such

failures that lend credence to the call for reform of the United Nations, in particular, reform of the Security Council. In this regard, the well-known position of the African Group has never made more sense than it does now.

The African continent still experiences internal armed conflicts. The African Union (AU), without usurping the powers of the Security Council, has taken the initiative to resolve some of those conflicts. However, the African Union's resources and capacities are limited. It is against this background that the African Union, through its Peace and Security Council, resolved to hand over the Darfur mission to the United Nations. It is our hope and earnest plea that the current misunderstanding between the United Nations and the Government of the Sudan will be resolved as a matter of urgency. The United Nations, particularly the Security Council, cannot afford to be a helpless spectator to yet another genocide.

My delegation calls for concerted efforts by the international community, and by the United Nations in collaboration with the African Union, to find a lasting solution to the crises in Somalia and Côte d'Ivoire. With regard to Somalia, the efforts of the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development to broker an agreement between the Transitional Government and the Islamic Courts must be complemented by the international community, specifically, the United Nations. There is also an urgent need to lift the arms embargo so that the Transitional Government may be able to function.

We congratulate the people of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, who, following decades of undemocratic rule and civil war, recently exercised their inalienable right to elect a Government of their choice. It is our hope that with continued assistance from the United Nations, particularly from United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and other partners, the second round of elections, scheduled for 29 October 2006, will proceed peacefully.

We likewise commend the people of Burundi on the signing of a peace agreement between the Government and the Forces nationales de libération (FNL). This should enable them to focus on the development issues of their country.

Furthermore, we congratulate the Government of the Republic of Uganda on the initiative aimed at

finding a political solution to the protracted war with the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). That war has taken its toll on the people of Uganda and has contributed to instability in the region.

We express our solidarity with the peoples of Palestine and Western Sahara in their struggle for self-determination and their quest for everlasting peace. Surely, things do not have to deteriorate to the level of the Israel-Lebanon conflict before the international community snaps into action in these two volatile situations.

Following the 2005 World Summit, and in the context of the reform of the United Nations, my delegation notes with satisfaction the creation of the Human Rights Council, the operationalization of the Peacebuilding Commission and the establishment of the Central Emergency Response Fund, among other achievements. These are timely events that continue to prove the relevance of this Organization in the twenty-first century.

My delegation also notes the efficient manner in which the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs responded in some countries that faced major man-made or natural disasters over the past year. That can be attributed to the newly established Central Emergency Response Fund. It is our hope that the Fund will continue to live up to the expectations of Member States.

The United Nations was founded on the interlinked and mutually reinforcing pillars of development, international peace and security and human rights. The issue of development deserves the undivided attention and commitment of Member States, just as do the issues of peace, security and human rights. Hence the call at the 2005 World Summit for a timely and full realization of development goals and objectives agreed upon at major United Nations conferences and summits in the economic, social and related fields.

My delegation is deeply concerned that Member States were largely divided between the South and the North regarding how to follow up on the development section of the 2005 World Summit Outcome Document (resolution 60/1). We are indeed disheartened that, due to a divergence of views on this important issue, the General Assembly was not in a position to suggest concrete actions to implement commitments made at the relevant conferences and summits.

It is past time for the General Assembly to suggest concrete actions on how to, among other things: fulfil the commitments to address the special needs of Africa; seriously address the uneven progress made by the least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing countries in achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs); address issues relating to trade, agricultural subsidies and the transfer of vitally needed resources to developing countries; and fully implement the global partnership for development as set out in the Millennium Declaration, the Monterrey Consensus, the Johannesburg Plan of Action and the 2005 World Summit Outcome.

My delegation hopes that at its current session the General Assembly will, among other things, finalize all details regarding the convening of a review conference on the implementation of the Monterrey Consensus. Furthermore, we hope that all stakeholders will reaffirm their commitment to the full implementation of the outcomes of the recently held high-level meetings on migration and development and on review of the implementation of the 2001 Brussels Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries.

There is definitely an inherent global benefit, for all countries, in the pursuit of development cooperation based on genuine partnership and mutually beneficial arrangements. The realities of globalization, liberalization and interdependence have demonstrated the inadequacies of the traditional modes of financing for development, such as official development assistance, foreign direct investment, trade and other forms of capital flows.

If all Member States are to achieve the Millennium Development Goals by 2015, certain measures must be undertaken. First, official development assistance must be doubled. It must also be timely, predictable and dependable. Secondly, all partnerships with New Partnership for Africa's Development must be linked to the Millennium Development Goals and other agreed upon development goals and targets. Finally, there must be complete debt cancellation, not just for the highly indebted poor countries, but for the least developed countries as well.

The suspension of the Doha Development Agenda negotiations was a disquieting development for some of our countries. While Africa had on various

occasions expressed concern on the limited progress made in negotiations on issues of major interest to the continent, our faith in the negotiations never wavered. We truly believed, and we still do, that there is a common understanding that trade is the most effective route out of poverty, and that the prosperity and security of all nations, rich or poor, strong or weak, are dependent on, *inter alia*, free and fair trade.

Much has been said about the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Its consequences are now commonly understood. Conferences at the highest levels have been held, subregionally, regionally, continentally and globally. These conferences discussed at length the importance of economic, technological and medical developments to subdue and defeat HIV/AIDS in affected countries. It is now time for words to be followed by concrete actions targeting, in particular, infected and affected groups and lowering infection prevalence rates.

My delegation regrets the paralysis that has befallen the United Nations disarmament machinery. Also regrettable is the failure of the 2005 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons to produce a consensus substantive outcome document. Equally regrettable is the absence of a section on non-proliferation and disarmament in the 2005 Summit Outcome Document. The coup de grâce, however, is the failure to agree on an outcome document of the 2006 United Nations Conference to Review Progress Made in the Implementation of the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons In All Its Aspects, adopted in 2001.

Thus, Member States should not run away from the blatant truth that, during the sixtieth session of the Assembly, the stalemate that, over the past four years, has characterized negotiations regarding non-proliferation and disarmament, finally became abundantly clear to all nations. For small arms and light weapons remain the weapons of choice that are indiscriminately used in conflicts, as well as in other forms of violence, including criminal behaviour. Yet they are still so cheap and so easily accessible that, in some remote villages, they are exchanged for chickens.

Terrorism continues to pose the greatest threat to human security. In this regard, I wish to welcome the adoption by the General Assembly of the United

Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy (resolution 60/288). However, it is unfortunate that the General Assembly's Ad Hoc Committee on International Terrorism has still not been able to conclude a comprehensive convention on an international response to terrorism in all its forms and manifestations. The fact remains that Member States have a moral obligation to overcome their long-standing differences on the definition of terrorism. Failure to agree on a definition, however, cannot and must not be used as an excuse for not decisively confronting the scourge of terrorism in all its forms and manifestations.

Following the adoption of Security Council resolution 1696 (2006) on 31 July, and the subsequent response by the Iranian Authorities, it is our fervent hope that all parties to the issue will constructively engage in seeking a lasting solution to avert possible economic and diplomatic sanctions and to guarantee Iran's peaceful nuclear programme.

Last but certainly not least, this session marks the end of tenure of office for an illustrious son of the African soil, a distinguished diplomat and statesman, in the person of His Excellency Mr. Kofi Annan. He leaves a legacy for this august body which every one of us must emulate in the best interests of the peoples we represent and serve. It is therefore befitting to pay tribute to him and to wish him and Mrs. Nane Annan a well-deserved rest and a future filled with happiness. He will, needless to say, be inundated with our calls for his wisdom and advice in the service of mankind.

Our standing ovation and the declaration made in honour of His Excellency Mr. Kofi Annan during the last African Union Summit held in Banjul, Gambia, said it all. With typical eloquence, he delivered a few days ago in the Assembly before the world's leaders a rich statement filled with emotion. No wonder that even the world leaders accorded him a standing ovation. His Excellency Mr. Kofi Annan has run his lap with excellence. He deserves a medal of honour.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Lesotho for the statement he has just made.

The Right Honourable Pakalitha Bethuel Mosisili, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Lesotho, was escorted from the rostrum.

Address by Mr. Tuilaepa Sailele Malielegaoi, Prime Minister, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade of the Independent State of Samoa

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the Prime Minister, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade of the Independent State of Samoa.

Mr. Tuilaepa Sailele Malielegaoi, Prime Minister, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade of the Independent State of Samoa, was escorted to the rostrum.

The Acting President: I have great pleasure in welcoming His Excellency Mr. Tuilaepa Sailele Malielegaoi, Prime Minister, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade of the Independent State of Samoa, and inviting him to address the General Assembly.

Mr. Malielegaoi (Samoa): Forty-four years ago, Samoa became independent, and when we joined the United Nations it was a reaffirmation of our support for the principle of multilateral cooperation which the United Nations embodied. It was also our statement that all States matter, that none was too small and weak to be represented in the United Nations on equal terms with the large and strong nations of the world. Those sentiments underpinned Samoa's belief in the United Nations as an expanding global family and its Member States as the custodians entrusted with the future of our world and the generations to come.

In essence, lasting peace and the sustained prosperity of the world depended on harmonious cooperation and effective global partnership amongst all nations. Those were the ideals that motivated us to be part of the united family of nations, and they remain relevant and valid for our country today.

A year ago, we met here in an act of solidarity, to chart a new course for our Organization that is aligned to meet the emerging challenges confronting our world today. Our Summit Outcome document was not just a road map to guide the work of our Organization. While it mirrored the intergovernmental nature and diverse membership of our Organization, the document, ultimately, was a reminder of the cooperative and shared interests we all have regarding issues vital to the United Nations and its Member States. It also brought to bear the importance of global partnerships in these times of interdependence, for the achievement

of sustainable development and peace and security for our peoples.

In less than twelve months, we have transformed rhetoric into reality. Solid progress has been made in the implementation of the Summit document. The Human Rights Council and the Peacebuilding Commission are now operational; credible reforms in the Secretariat and management have been implemented; a Central Emergency Response Fund has been set up; and a Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy had been unanimously adopted. But, as we well know, that is just the start; the real work lies ahead. In our view, it is imperative that even in the early stages of their work, those bodies must immediately adhere to the guiding principles of respect, integrity, credibility and professionalism to ensure that the objectives of relevance, efficiency and transparency envisioned for the Organization are delivered.

Development, security and human rights are the three pillars of the United Nations. All are mutually reinforcing. The United Nations commitment to the achievement of these goals, particularly for the least developed countries (LDCs) and the developing countries, is set out in a number of internationally agreed initiatives such as the Brussels Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries, the Johannesburg Plan of Action, the Millennium Development Goals, and the Mauritius Strategy for Small Island Developing States.

Those development frameworks provide for global partnerships for the achievement, in small and vulnerable economies, of economic growth, sustainable development and the resilience to endure external shocks. Samoa looks forward to the implementation of the partnerships indicated in the development frameworks approved by the United Nations.

In Samoa's case, the implementing framework for the partnerships of the Government with the donor community, civil society and the private sector are designed to address the development priorities of our country as set out in the Strategy for the Development of Samoa. It is through such partnerships that we look too, for the effective delivery of programmes that address major health challenges such as HIV/AIDS and the potential threat of the avian bird flu. Similarly, there is the collaborative work with our partners to support the empowerment of our women.

As to security and the specific context of stability and harmony within communities, I cannot overemphasize the importance of global actions to control and limit the availability of small arms weapons. These weapons in the hands of the wrong people can easily destabilize communities and plunge small nations into deadly conflict. We therefore renew our call for the early implementation of the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects.

During the review of the Brussels Programme of Action this week, I shared with Member States the challenges that continue to confront my country. Samoa is both a least developed country and a very small island developing State. The United Nations has received a proposal for Samoa to be graduated from the list of LDCs. However, the vulnerabilities and the fragility that characterize our small island economy, as reflected in Samoa's poor ranking under various economic vulnerability indices have, not gone away.

Working closely with our traditional development partners, we have tried our best to develop and manage our economy, and we have made good strides in improving the welfare of our people. But we know very well from grim past experience that it takes just one devastating disaster to wipe out our modest achievements and set back the economy for years. Our request, therefore, is for Samoa's graduation from the list of LDCs to be deferred and reconsidered when Samoa has met the graduation threshold according to the economic vulnerability index.

Last week we broke new ground with the discussion for the first time in the United Nations context of the multidimensional aspects of international migration and development. The enthusiasm to consider migration and development as a priority concern in the United Nations agenda was well supported. The concrete outcomes that emerged from that initiative will ultimately depend on the willingness of the source countries and the destination countries to work out imaginative and humane arrangements beneficial to both.

The significance of international migration, whether permanent or temporary, as a development option for our region has not escaped the attention of Pacific leaders. It is also an option that raises difficult issues that touch on the welfare and humanitarian

treatment of migrants, as well as on sensitive considerations on the part of receiving countries.

In just six years into the millennium, it has become more and more evident that many of the challenges we face have significant global dimensions. They are borderless, do not discriminate between developed and developing countries and have no respect for national sovereignty. Those global concerns, imaginatively called problems without passports, include climate change, epidemics, humanitarian concerns, conflict containment, security concerns and terrorism. By their very nature, the successful resolution of those challenges requires a collective and concerted effort of the whole United Nations membership, because no one country or group of countries is capable of tackling them alone.

Terrorism, in its various forms and manifestations, is responsible for the horror and fear that has gripped the world's attention in recent years. No country is immune to the reaches of terrorism and we are all affected in varying degrees. We must continue to be resolute in our fight against terrorism. Let us reiterate in the strongest terms possible that terrorist acts, committed under whatever pretext or purpose, can never be justified as morally acceptable. Equally, countering terrorism does not confer immunity from the rule of law, nor the abandonment of the principles of a civilized society.

The unanimous adoption of a United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy two weeks ago was both a condemnation of terrorism in all its forms and a commitment by Member States to take concrete preventative measures, collectively and individually. The work ahead is to turn commitment into implementation.

The Middle East conflict continues to defy attempts to usher in a new era of trust and hopeful beginnings for the region. Sustainable peace remains an elusive goal, permanently out of our Organization's reach as long as the root causes of the problem are not addressed. Too much is at stake.

Let us not forget the voiceless majority, unwillingly caught in the crossfire of the conflict, who yearn for a lasting peace. We should, therefore, not be judgmental or partisan in our approach. Ultimately, the Palestinian people need a permanent and an independent State, living in peace, with a secure Israel. The Security Council, by responding decisively to

recent developments in the Lebanon-Israel conflict, gives us hope that perhaps an eventual resolution of that long drawn-out conflict is finally within sight.

The humanitarian and security situation in Darfur is a cause for concern. The recent resolution adopted by the Security Council will, we hope, be agreeable to all the parties with a genuine desire to expeditiously resolve the issue.

We continue to hope that the elected Governments of Iraq and Afghanistan will ultimately succeed in achieving conditions that will allow their peoples to live meaningful lives and consolidate the democratization of their societies.

Many other countries in different parts of the world are also still mired in tragic conflict and look to the United Nations and its stronger Members for peacekeeping arrangements that can give time for those communities in strife to re-establish and find lasting solutions. Samoa, despite our small size, will continue to support that important work. At present we contribute police personnel for the United Nations Missions in the Sudan, Liberia, Timor-Leste and in the Solomon Islands.

Climate change issues remain a priority for the Pacific region. In our small islands, natural catastrophes are capable of destruction that devastates the entire country. They bring great pain and upheaval to the lives of our people, as well as set back the national economy for years. We know that from repeated past experience. The need, therefore, for good early-warning systems for natural disaster alerts in our Pacific region is a priority. The willingness of our partners to assist and share expertise in that area is most welcomed.

The Global Environment Facility Trust Fund — recently replenished for the fourth time — demonstrates very well the joint partnership between the developed and the developing countries in implementing programmes to address environmental problems.

Samoa continues to strongly support international and regional efforts to combat global warming and environmental degradation. In our view, the evidence of global warming and its causes are well established. Apportioning blame and point scoring should no longer be allowed to deflect efforts at effective and collective responses. We now know that concerted action should

have been taken much earlier and further delays would simply make the size of the problem greater and the solutions more costly.

Good progress has been achieved in the efforts to reform our Organization. I would like to pay tribute to the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, for his inspirational work in balancing the interests of Member States, which did not always coincide, and for his influence that made it possible for agreement to be reached on the reform agenda. I thank the Secretary-General for his courage and leadership, so that even in the face of great controversy, the United Nations remained relevant to the crises and challenges that our world and the Organization has faced during his watch.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the Prime Minister, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade of the Independent State of Samoa for the statement just made.

His Excellency Mr. Tuilaepa Sailele Malielegaoi, Prime Minister, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade of the Independent State of Samoa, was escorted from the rostrum.

Address by His Excellency Mr. Robert Fico, Prime Minister of the Slovak Republic

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the Prime Minister of the Slovak Republic.

His Excellency Mr. Robert Fico, Prime Minister of the Slovak Republic, was escorted to the rostrum.

The Acting President: I have great pleasure in welcoming His Excellency Mr. Robert Fico, Prime Minister of the Slovak Republic, and I invite him to address the General Assembly.

Mr. Fico (Slovak Republic): I would like to express my deepest appreciation and most sincere gratitude to the Secretary-General, His Excellency Mr. Kofi Annan, for the invaluable work and tireless dedication with which he led this Organization into the twenty-first century. The Secretary-General has led the United Nations well and he will be remembered with praise for it. May I use this opportunity also to state our full support to his successor, who will have to deal with the difficult challenges the United Nations is going to face.

Before proceeding to my remarks, I would like to point out that Slovakia fully subscribes to the statement delivered earlier by the President of Finland on behalf of the European Union.

It gives me great pleasure to address the General Assembly today, even more so as it is the first time I am speaking from this rostrum as the Prime Minister of Slovakia. My Government — formed only three months ago — is committed to a foreign policy that emphasizes effective multilateralism and promotes democracy, international peace and security, greater respect for human rights — including the rights of persons belonging to national and other minorities — rule of law, social equity and environmental protection. We are focused on building a social state where economic growth goes along with the growth of the standard of living of the people.

All of us know that the United Nations is once again at a crossroads, as we face the historic test of multilateralism. The humanitarian disaster in Sudan, recent conflict in Lebanon, continuing dispute over the Iranian nuclear programme, violence in East Timor, increasing military activity in Afghanistan and Somalia, along with the negative developments in other conflict regions, remind us that we live in a world of evolving threats and challenges.

Modern threats could not have been anticipated when the United Nations was founded in 1945. In fact, the United Nations is challenged, as never before, to deal with ethnic and other inter-State conflicts, weak and failed States, genocide and ethnic cleansing, complex humanitarian disasters and poverty, along with threats of nuclear terrorism, transnational organized crime, infectious diseases and environmental degradation. The major challenges of today cannot be managed by sovereign States acting alone. Hence, the key challenge for all of us is to learn how to collectively manage the complex issues of the world of today and how to ensure the relevance of the United Nations and its leadership in the process.

Slovakia, as a smaller country, is a strong believer in multilateralism. Our present experience as an elected member of the Security Council fully proves that only through effective multilateral action can the world community successfully address modern threats and resolve current conflicts. But — and I underline that “but” — as long as the international community, acting through the United Nations, is unable to take

decisive action to protect populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity, as in the case of Rwanda or Darfur, as long as the United Nations ignores regressive developments and violations of human rights in some parts of the world, as long as it is unable to fight terrorism more effectively and intervene in situations that do not yet pose a threat to international peace and security but have the potential to swiftly reach that stage, respect for the United Nations will decline in the eyes of our citizens.

Slovakia is, therefore, a strong supporter of United Nations reform. We must continue building on what has been achieved so far, including the establishment of the Peacebuilding Commission, adoption of the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy and progress in management reform. We need to focus on reducing tensions between developed and developing countries and on building consensus regarding the future direction of reforms. It is unrealistic to expect that all States will share and promote a single version of United Nations reform. But we have to overcome the zero-sum mentality and continue with the reform debate, with a view to achieving mutual concessions and compromises on specific issues.

We particularly welcome the creation of the Human Rights Council as a step towards realizing the idea of three equal councils embodying three equal pillars of the United Nations. But we ought to be cautious and avoid slipping back into the old habits that made its predecessor so dysfunctional.

Revitalization of the General Assembly, enhancement of the role of the Economic and Social Council and reform of the Security Council remain unfinished business. The reform of the Council should, first and foremost, address the issue of increasing its capacity to act preventively and to take decisive action early enough to prevent conflicts. The Security Council must become more representative, more effective and more transparent.

For its part, Slovakia is ready to engage constructively in meaningful negotiations to achieve those goals. Slovakia, as the co-chair of the ad hoc committee on mandate review in the Security Council, is working hard together with our partners to achieve tangible results in the near future. We hope that visible progress of the process within the Security Council can inspire other United Nations bodies.

Slovakia is concerned about the current situation in the Middle East, in particular in Lebanon and the Palestinian territories. We firmly believe that there is no military solution to the Middle East conflict. The only way to achieve a comprehensive and lasting settlement is through peaceful negotiations and full implementation of all relevant Security Council resolutions, as well as the principles defined by the Quartet. Also, only through negotiations and further diplomatic efforts can we fulfil the vision of two democratic States, Israel and Palestine, living side-by-side in peace and security. New efforts must be undertaken to revive the peace process based on full respect for principles defined by the Quartet in the adopted road map.

Another source of our deep concern is the alarming security and humanitarian situation in Darfur, which continues to deteriorate in spite of numerous efforts of the Security Council, the African Union, the United Nations Secretary-General and the international community at large. We are talking here about a humanitarian disaster of large scale; we, therefore, urgently need to intensify our efforts and break the long-lasting cycle of violence.

In particular, we need to make sure that the Government of National Unity of Sudan finally gives its consent to the planned transition to a United Nations-led operation in Darfur. The concept of "responsibility to protect" adopted at last year's World Summit applies to all Member States and to all Governments. When peaceful means prove inadequate and national authorities are failing to protect their own citizens, the international community has the responsibility to act collectively through the Security Council to prevent another Rwanda or Srebrenica.

As a matter of priority, Slovakia has been closely following developments in the Western Balkans. Our involvement there is based on the principles of transparency and impartiality. Our priority is to strengthen the stability of the region and to support the processes of democratization and integration.

As for the issue of the future of Kosovo, we continue to believe that it is important to seek a settlement through direct talks and dialogue and compromise, from both Belgrade and Pristina. Only a solution that reflects the concerns of all parties involved and provides for the rights of members of all communities, notably the Kosovo Serbs, can ensure

lasting security and stability in the region. The Kosovo issue is truly a *sui generis* case.

We are also deeply concerned about the nuclear programme of Iran and the proliferation risk it presents to international peace and security. We urge the Iranian authorities to respond positively to the proposed package of incentives and to suspend its uranium enrichment activities. For our part, we are ready to continue the dialogue with Iran in a constructive and open fashion. However, Iran, like any other Member of the United Nations, must comply with Security Council resolutions and with all relevant decisions of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), and must fully cooperate with them.

The proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and related delivery systems technology continues to threaten global security. This is a serious challenge, and we must face it with all responsibility. It requires joint multilateral efforts and a common and effective response. In May of this year, Secretary-General Kofi Annan told the Conference on Disarmament that the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) regime, faces "a twin crisis, of compliance and of confidence". With regret, we have to acknowledge that he was absolutely right.

We should work together to overcome deadly links like that between armament and proliferation and to create a progress-friendly atmosphere. We need to restore confidence through compliance with all relevant obligations and commitments. As the Chairman of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to Council resolution 1540 (2004), Slovakia tries to facilitate the process of the full implementation of all measures to prevent the formation of a nexus between the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and terrorism. We hope that agreement on the Committee's programme of work will be reached as soon as possible.

We also preside over the Conference on Disarmament, and we are working to intensify efforts to reverse the process of repeated failure during the recent period and undertake constructive dialogue, which would bring about long-expected results. Our aim is to help revitalize the Conference and give new breath to that single multilateral disarmament-negotiating forum of the international community.

In conclusion, I would like to draw attention to an issue which is increasingly important in shaping

international programmes for development assistance, the promotion of democracy, security cooperation and post-conflict peacebuilding. I am referring to security-sector reform. Slovakia seeks to stimulate a broad discussion on the role of security-sector reform in the United Nations context, with a view to increasing understanding of the topic and suggesting possible options for the development of a comprehensive and coherent approach. Our wish is to give an impetus to developing a comprehensive policy framework that would guide United Nations security-sector reform programmes and projects in a coherent, consistent and sustainable way.

As Mr. Jan Eliasson stressed in his remarkable speech at the conclusion of the sixtieth session of the General Assembly (see A/60/PV.100), the test of whether we have re-established the United Nations and international cooperation as the best way to manage our global affairs did not occur in the past year, but it will occur in the years ahead.

My wish is that all of us will pass the test and create a United Nations that can live up to the expectations and aspirations of our peoples.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the Prime Minister of the Slovak Republic for the statement he has just made.

His Excellency Mr. Robert Fico, Prime Minister of the Slovak Republic, was escorted from the rostrum.

Address by His Excellency Mr. Miyegombo Enkhbold, Prime Minister of Mongolia

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the Prime Minister of Mongolia.

His Excellency Mr. Miyegombo Enkhbold, Prime Minister of Mongolia, was escorted to the rostrum.

The Acting President: I have great pleasure in welcoming His Excellency Mr. Miyegombo Enkhbold, Prime Minister of Mongolia, and inviting him to address the General Assembly.

Mr. Enkhbold (Mongolia) (*spoke in Mongolian; English text provided by the delegation*): Considerable progress has been made in implementing the specific set of actions to ensure peace, development and human rights that was agreed upon by more than 150 heads of

State or Government at last year's World Summit. The Peacebuilding Commission, the Human Rights Council, the Central Emergency Response Fund, the United Nations Democracy Fund, the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy and other achievements speak for themselves.

However, we cannot afford to be complacent about what we have achieved so far. Redoubled efforts ought to be made to ensure that people in every corner of the world feel the benefits of development in their everyday lives. Secretary-General Kofi Annan, in his annual report on the work of the Organization, observes that

"The words of 2005 have yet to have a direct impact on the lives of the poor people they are meant to help. Nor have they produced the implementation breakthroughs required to achieve the Millennium Development Goals". (A/61/1, para. 27)

That conclusion is sad, but true.

My delegation therefore welcomes the most timely initiative of the presidency to focus our attention at this session of the General Assembly on the implementation of the global partnership for development. The global partnership for development was framed as Millennium Development Goal (MDG) 8 and thus cannot be divorced from other development goals and objectives.

In our view, the global partnership for development means a global compact between developed and developing States. It is the responsibility of developing countries to formulate and implement sound policies to ensure their sustainable economic and social development and, to that end, to mobilize domestic resources. For the developed countries, it entails an obligation to support such efforts through the provision of development financing, including official development assistance (ODA), in a timely and sufficient manner and to ensure increased market access for developing countries. Mongolia, for one, takes its responsibilities seriously and is committed to its development objectives.

Allow me to describe the policies and specific actions taken by my country to implement the MDGs, as well as my views on the need to build partnerships to achieve them. First, Mongolia attaches particular importance to its implementation of the MDGs. Our

first progress report was discussed at both the Cabinet and parliamentary levels, resulting in parliament's adoption in April last year of a resolution institutionalizing Mongolia's MDGs. Thus, the Goals have been mainstreamed into the guidelines for the country's economic and social development, and the funds necessary to meet the individual goals are reflected in the annual State budget.

Secondly, to honour its commitment made in the 2005 World Summit Outcome Document (resolution 60/1), Mongolia is developing an MDG-based comprehensive development strategy and plans to submit the first draft to parliament during its autumn session. The active participation of political parties, civil society and the private sector in that undertaking will ensure the sustainable implementation of the national development strategy over the years.

Thirdly, the adoption of an additional, ninth, Millennium Development Goal (MDG) — on the promotion of human rights, fostering democratic governance and combating corruption — was an innovative step that reflected the indissoluble link between development, good governance, human rights and democracy in our national policy. Within the framework of working towards meeting that goal, the parliament recently passed a new law against corruption, thereby creating a legal environment to remove the shackles that that phenomenon imposes on development. In accordance with the new law, a new anti-corruption body is to be set up to deal with raising public awareness and to address ways to prevent and uncover corruption, investigate cases of corruption and audit the financial and income declarations of public officials.

Fourthly, the Government of National Unity, which was formed early this year, is undertaking a host of quick-impact projects on poverty reduction and income-generation in the implementation of its MDGs, in order that the benefits of the social security policy can reach various strata of the population. Allow me to cite a few examples.

Salaries in the public sector have been raised by 33 per cent, and the minimum wage by 30 per cent. A monthly allowance is being provided to every one of the nearly 1 million children in Mongolia, which accounts for almost half of the entire population. Married couples and new-born children are provided financial support on a one-time basis. Mothers with

five or more children and older persons have seen considerable increases in their monthly allowances and pensions. In collaboration with the private sector, this academic year my Government introduced a free school-meal programme for elementary school children. The launching of all those quick-impact initiatives will contribute to our efforts to reduce poverty and achieve the MDGs.

Fifthly, on the policy level, my Government is placing particular emphasis on the human development dimension of the MDGs, including in such areas as education and health. For example, a programme on the theme of "A healthy Mongolian", which is to be implemented between 2006 and 2008, will provide for medical check-ups and diagnosis and carry out surveys of the prevalent illnesses among the population over 15 years of age. The programme will also include preventive measures and treatment. Furthermore, the implementation of our education master plan for the period 2006-2015, will improve access to education and the quality and competitiveness of our national education system, ultimately advancing the level of human development. The plan will also contribute to the goal of increasing employment by means of developing human resources in a way that corresponds to the economic structure of the country and meets the demands of the labour market.

In addition, on the initiative of my Government, amendments have been made to the tax code that aim at easing the overall tax burden, thereby creating a favourable business environment, promoting greater economic growth and generating new jobs.

Although Mongolia is poised to achieve most of its MDGs by 2015 in the areas of education, gender, child and maternal health and combating various diseases, the goals of halving poverty and ensuring environmental sustainability continue to be a source of concern. It goes without saying that, like many other developing countries, Mongolia will not be able to achieve those goals on its own. Genuine partnership and effective cooperation between all stakeholders — including bilateral and multilateral donors, international financial organizations and the private sector — is therefore required in order to substantially reduce poverty and promote development in the developing world.

The quality of aid should also be improved through the tailoring of foreign grants and loans to the

implementation needs of the MDGs and MDG-based national development strategies. That improvement should also be achieved by providing more predictable and multi-year aid flows, addressing weaknesses in institutional capacity and harmonizing the distribution of aid with the priorities of recipient countries, in accordance with the principles set out in the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness.

Mongolia is a landlocked developing country dependent on a few export commodities. We are therefore highly susceptible to fluctuations in the world's commodity and energy markets. I believe that the establishment of commodity-price stabilization mechanisms and anti-shock facilities could make a tangible contribution to poverty reduction measures in low-income commodity-dependent countries. At the same time, trade and investment are among the driving forces of development. The World Trade Organization Doha Development Round of negotiations should therefore be revived, with a view to creating a more favourable and just trade regime that involves market access and trade and industrial capacity-building assistance for developing countries, particularly for economically vulnerable States. For its part, Mongolia is preparing to host a conference of trade ministers of landlocked developing countries in 2007.

I should also like to urge the international community to focus its attention on the declaration adopted at the first-ever Meeting of the Heads of State or Government of Landlocked Developing Countries held last week in Havana. That document reflects the common position of landlocked LDCs. Its full implementation will be instrumental in assisting landlocked LDCs, including Mongolia, as they carry out their development and poverty reduction efforts.

Democracy plays an important role in bringing about peace and development. Although democracy is rooted in the soil of individual societies, it has to be supported through international cooperation. In its capacity as Chair of the fifth International Conference of New or Restored Democracies, Mongolia has endeavoured to promote democratic values at the international level. We have undertaken a set of concrete measures as follow-up to the fifth Conference, including the development of nationally owned democratic-governance indicators, a country information note and a national plan of action to consolidate democracy. We have also introduced a tripartite structure in the Conference to include

Governments, parliaments and civil society. We have also set up a friends-of-the-chair group and are fully utilizing the follow-up mechanism in New York. It is gratifying to note that the international follow-up conference to the fifth International Conference, which was held in Ulaanbaatar last June, highly commended the work done over the last three years. My country is prepared to report on its activities and to share its accomplishments and lessons learned with the greater membership of the movement during the sixth International Conference of New or Restored Democracies, which is to be held next month in Doha, Qatar.

This year marks the 800th anniversary of the establishment of the great Mongol State — a remarkable date for my country. The General Assembly, in resolution 60/16, adopted last year, invited Member States, international organizations and academia to take an active part in the commemorative events associated with the anniversary. I wish to express our great appreciation to all persons — including people of Mongol ethnicity, academics and guests from various countries and organizations — for their active participation in the many international conferences organized in the spirit of that resolution. Those meetings included the international conference on traditions of Mongolian statehood, the ninth international forum of Mongolists, the convention of world Mongolians and the international workshop on the traditions of nomads. I am also happy to acknowledge that more than 300 high-level guests representing more than 30 States and Governments attended our national day ceremony — Naadam — which was the main commemorative event of the year.

The year-round celebration of activities and events are of particular importance, as they help us modern-day Mongols heirs to statehood preserve and develop nomadic culture and traditions and to re-introduce to the world our rich history and culture, along with the progress and challenges facing us today.

The sixty-first session has special meaning for us, as it coincides with the 45th anniversary of Mongolia's membership in the world Organization. Our admission to the United Nations as a full-fledged Member, on 27 October 1961, was a historically important event for the people of Mongolia. Over the years, our cooperation with the United Nations has expanded in terms of both content and scope. The Organization's support and assistance have been instrumental in

helping Mongolia meet its development goals, build capacity and consolidate democracy. For its part, Mongolia has all along supported the United Nations. We have also striven to participate actively in its activities and to make our contribution to the efforts of the international community to find solutions to the pressing issues facing the world.

This autumn, we are about to select the next Secretary-General of the United Nations. Beginning in 2007, that person will represent the international community on the world stage. The next Secretary-General must be someone who will effectively follow through with the bold initiatives and reform efforts carried out by the current Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, in the areas of peace, development and human rights. That person must also be committed to making the world a better place, and possess strong managerial skills, vision and experience. In short, he or she must be a genuine leader. I am convinced that such a person can, and should, come from Asia, which is home to half of the world's population.

Mongolia is prepared to participate actively in the work of the United Nations and of other multilateral organizations and processes. We reaffirm our commitment to the world Organization as a central coordinating instrument of the common efforts of the world's nations to maintain peace and promote development.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the Prime Minister of Mongolia for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Miyegombo Enkhbold, Prime Minister of Mongolia, was escorted from the rostrum.

Address by Mr. Solomon Ekuma Berewa, Vice-President of the Republic of Sierra Leone

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the Vice-President of the Republic of Sierra Leone.

Mr. Solomon Ekuma Berewa, Vice-President of the Republic of Sierra Leone, was escorted to the rostrum.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have great pleasure in welcoming His Excellency Mr. Solomon Ekuma Berewa, Vice-President of the Republic of Sierra Leone, and inviting him to address the General Assembly.

Mr. Berewa (Sierra Leone): The delegation of the Republic of Sierra Leone would like to congratulate the President on her assumption of the responsibility for directing the work of the sixty-first session of the General Assembly. It is our pleasure to reaffirm our confidence in her ability to run the Assembly, as well as to pledge our unflinching support and cooperation during her tenure.

Let me also take this opportunity to pay special tribute to her predecessor, Mr. Jan Eliasson, for his commitment and diplomatic skill, which enabled him effectively to manage the Assembly and help the reform process to achieve some major successes during his presidency.

A year ago, the heads of Member States of the United Nations declared their commitment to the reform of the Organization, in order to reflect its experience in the course of 60 years of existence and its ever-expanding role within the context of the realities of the current world order. The process has, understandably, been painfully slow, because of the multiplicity of competing national interests. While my delegation appreciates the progress made so far, particularly in the form of the establishment of the Human Rights Council and the Peacebuilding Commission, we are unhappy about the sluggish pace of Security Council reform, a matter that is close to the heart of Africa.

As a Member State deeply committed to the African position on United Nations reform, my delegation would like to urge the reform of the Security Council to move faster so that our continent can take its rightful place in the United Nations organ that is responsible for the maintenance of international peace and security. Obviously, the Security Council can never be the just, democratic and representative body that it should be if Africa, with 53 Member States in the United Nations, does not have permanent representation proportional to its size.

As a least developed country (LDC) emerging from a devastating conflict, we are also concerned that development has not been treated with the prominence and urgency it deserves in the reform process, considering its cause-and-effect relationship with conflict and human rights. That relationship was succinctly recognized in one of the outcomes of last year's High-level Plenary Meeting of the General Assembly, which stated that our nations and peoples

could not enjoy development without security, nor would they enjoy security in the absence of development, and they would not enjoy either without respect for human rights. The need, therefore, to support development programmes — including the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the New Partnership for Africa's Development — as the foundation for peace and security cannot be overemphasized.

We are particularly happy about the establishment of the Human Rights Council, whose operation, we hope, will be above the weaknesses that demoralized the former Human Rights Commission. We call on all Member States, in particular the Council's founding members, to set and maintain standards that will justify the optimism that the new Council will refrain from practices that discredited the Human Rights Commission.

Of particular interest to us as a post-conflict country, however, is the Peacebuilding Commission, whose mandate is to support the recovery of societies emerging from conflict. We thank the Commission for choosing Sierra Leone as one of two countries where it will begin operation. We assure the Commission of our fullest support and cooperation. As it will soon discover, if it has not yet done so, we have already embarked on the path of peacebuilding and consolidation, having carefully formulated policies and activities aimed at achieving lasting peace, security and stability, which are the critical requirements for meaningful development.

We have developed a poverty reduction strategy paper that has attracted support from a number of donor agencies and friendly countries. We have produced a peace-consolidation strategy paper, which is to be presented to the Peacebuilding Commission for support in addressing some of the challenges facing our country in the areas of governance and security prior to the forthcoming presidential and parliamentary elections in 2007.

For the Peacebuilding Commission to be able to work in Sierra Leone on the basis of concrete, first-hand information, we have extended an invitation to the Commission to visit Sierra Leone. We are looking forward to receiving the Commission in Sierra Leone.

The United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone completed its peacekeeping mandate and closed down at the end of 2005. But the United Nations did not

leave behind a complete vacuum, it left the United Nations Integrated Office for Sierra Leone (UNIOSIL) to support our post-conflict recovery programme. We thank the United Nations for its continued support and assure the Organization that its contribution will not be in vain. We have no doubt that the combined efforts of the Peacebuilding Commission, UNIOSIL and the Government will achieve the desired objective of peace, security and development in the country.

The people of Sierra Leone are proud of their role in resolving their own conflict, as well as of their successes in the democratic process. We had a highly successful democratic election in 2002, barely five months after the end of the conflict. That was followed by local government elections as part of a governance decentralization process. Our second post-conflict presidential and parliamentary elections, which will mark a transition in leadership, are scheduled to be held around this time next year. Sierra Leone cannot afford having that watershed election go wrong, but we need assistance to carry it out properly. I therefore appeal to the United Nations, the European Union, other members of the international community and our bilateral friends to continue to help us, both financially and technically, to make the elections another milestone achievement in Sierra Leone's peace and democracy processes.

The people of Sierra Leone are conscious of the fact that the peace they now enjoy is a product of the support of, and cooperation with, the United Nations and the international community. At this stage in our history, the country is faced with three sets of challenges as a nation: we must rectify the accumulated errors of past policies; we must repair the damage and heal the scars left by the conflict; and we must chart an appropriate path for the development of our small country in the twenty-first century. We have the natural resources to be able to do that. With time, our human resources will also measure up. Above all, at this time we need the sustained engagement of international partners. That is why we are seeking to expand and reinforce our partnerships with the external world — partnerships that can support us now, and remain with us as we pursue a longer-term agenda for sustainable development.

Finally, we are in a conflict-ridden region and the peace in Sierra Leone cannot be sustained in isolation. We therefore urge the United Nations to continue its

efforts to pursue durable peace in the West African subregion.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the Vice-President of the Republic of Sierra Leone for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Solomon Ekuma Berewa, Vice-President of the Republic of Sierra Leone, was escorted from the rostrum.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Ban Ki-moon, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade of the Republic of Korea.

Mr. Ban Ki-moon (Republic of Korea): Let me begin by congratulating the presidency on the success of the High-level Meeting on the least developed countries, earlier in the week. I had the honour of participating in the Meeting, which heralded a very productive year for the Assembly under the astute leadership of Her Excellency Ms. Haya Rashed Al-Khalifa, President of the General Assembly, and her Bureau.

I would like to express my deepest thanks and admiration to His Excellency Secretary-General Kofi Annan for his unparalleled dedication and contribution to world peace and prosperity through his dedicated service to our global Organization.

The United Nations was created, first and foremost, to forestall another world war. Not only has it achieved that cardinal goal despite four decades of cold war, but it has also offered States multiple means of resolving their differences, short of war. However, we cannot be sanguine about future trends. If the primary task of the United Nations in the twentieth century was to curb inter-State conflict, its core mandate in the new century must be to strengthen States and to preserve the inter-State system in the face of new challenges.

Some assert that the United Nations is poorly equipped to deal with new threats, such as those posed by non-State actors seeking to undermine the international order. The Charter was crafted to give Member States ample flexibility in adapting the United Nations machinery to respond to novel threats in a changing world. But our tools need sharpening.

Since the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001, the United Nations has played an increasingly

indispensable role in the international community's counter-terrorism efforts. Still, agreement on a comprehensive convention on international terrorism remains elusive. But we must continue to try. In the meantime, the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy (resolution 60/288), adopted at the end of the sixtieth session of the Assembly, will guide our collective efforts to free the world from the scourge of terrorism.

The proliferation of weapons of mass destruction poses an equally urgent and unacceptable threat to the peace and security of the world. We cannot permit the credibility of the international nuclear non-proliferation regime, built around the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), to be undermined by evasion and concealment concerning safeguards obligations. We should redouble our efforts to get more countries to sign and ratify International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) additional protocols. An early start of negotiations on a fissile material cut-off treaty and an early entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) should also be supported.

Meanwhile, we must seek peaceful solutions to the outstanding challenges to the system, including the Iranian nuclear issue that is before the Security Council. It is not too late to work towards a negotiated solution on that issue with its far-reaching implications. I would call for creative, constructive thinking on the part of all parties concerned, so as to resolve the issue within the framework of the NPT regime.

As for the situation on the Korean peninsula, the nuclear and missile programmes of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea constitute a serious challenge to the non-proliferation regime, as well as to regional security. My Government fully supports Security Council resolution 1695 (2006). We urge the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to refrain from any action that might aggravate the situation, and to return to the Six-Party Talks without preconditions, for a diplomatic resolution of the matter.

In that regard, during the summit meeting held last week in Washington, D.C., President Roh Moo-hyun and President Bush agreed to work with other nations of the Six-Party Talks to develop a common and comprehensive approach to energize the stalled talks. I strongly hope that those efforts will bear

fruit and that we can work to realize the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula as envisaged in the Joint Statement adopted on 19 September 2005.

Although not mentioned in the Charter, peacekeeping has become a defining feature of the post-cold-war era, as well as the largest, most expensive and most visible operational activity of the United Nations. The surge in calls for the services of the Blue Helmets attests to the Organization's continuing, even growing, relevance.

The expanded United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) in southern Lebanon is a challenging case in point. To succeed, UNIFIL must have the active support of all Member States, backed by timely humanitarian and economic assistance. To that end, my Government has been providing substantial humanitarian assistance to the afflicted population.

The undiminished human suffering in Palestine remains another source of deep concern. We urge the early revival of the stalled peace process.

The violence and the loss of innocent lives in Iraq concern us enormously as well. We trust that Iraq will become a stable and prosperous democracy under the leadership of its new Government. As a friend of Iraq, my Government supports its efforts at national reconstruction and welcomes the recent launch of the International Compact with Iraq to speed the process.

In Africa, stability and democracy are gaining ground, step by step, in Sierra Leone, Liberia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The security and humanitarian crisis in Darfur, however, remains acute. The Secretary-General's strong personal engagement has been critical in sustaining international attention and the flow of assistance to the beleaguered people of Darfur. Now, the smooth transition of the African Union Mission in the Sudan to the United Nations Mission in the Sudan must be accomplished in accordance with Security Council resolution 1706 (2006).

The performance of the United Nations cannot be measured by the creation of new machinery, any more than by the adoption of resolutions. As the Secretary-General has wisely reminded us, what matters is whether and how the United Nations makes a difference in the lives of people and in the conduct of States and non-State actors over time.

Two new intergovernmental bodies, the Human Rights Council and the Peacebuilding Commission, seek to make just such a difference. Their success, however, is far from assured. A great deal is at stake. Will the new Human Rights Council usher in an era of renewed cooperation and solidarity in the work of the United Nations on human rights? Will the universal periodic review succeed in offering all States a candid and constructive assessment of ways to enhance their human rights practices?

Together, we can make the Council the pre-eminent global forum for the advancement of human rights around the world. Divided, we will lose a historic opportunity. The protection of human rights is not a matter of choice. It is the solemn duty of all responsible members of the international community. Without respect for human rights — in particular for the most vulnerable members of society — peace and development have little meaning.

The successful conclusion of the negotiations on a convention on the rights of persons with disabilities speaks to the essential humanity of the United Nations, which is its most precious asset. The Republic of Korea is fully committed to the principle of all human rights for all. We deeply empathize with the suffering in those areas of the world where human rights are given little more than lip service.

In particular, we fully share the international community's concern over the situation of human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. We call upon the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to heed those concerns and to meet the call for dialogue on human rights.

The United Nations greeted the twenty-first century with a solemn promise to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015. Progress has been made, but it has been far too uneven from country to country and from region to region. Those countries in Africa that lack the minimum resources for development require the focused attention and assistance of the international community. Key goals, such as the eradication of extreme poverty and curbing the spread of HIV/AIDS and other diseases, are in danger of slipping out of reach if we do not act quickly and decisively.

Meeting the MDGs by 2015 is a tall order, but we should never forget that, for the neediest members of humankind, the United Nations may be the only beacon

of hope for a better life. The credibility of the United Nations largely depends upon its ability to accomplish its mission as regards the MDGs. While developing countries should take primary responsibility and ownership for their own development, we must honour our commitments and redouble our efforts to realize effective global partnerships for development.

The target established at the 2005 World Summit of 0.7 per cent of gross national income for development assistance forms the cornerstone of our strong commitment to achieving the MDGs. Innovative sources of financing, such as the air-ticket solidarity fund, need to be further explored. New sources of financing should not, however, be a substitute for existing official development assistance (ODA). As part of its commitment to doubling overall ODA by 2009, this year my Government launched Korea's Initiative for Africa's Development. Under that initiative, we will substantially increase our development assistance to Africa.

The key lessons to be drawn from the Korean experience over the decades are that education is key to development, and that women and girls are the most effective agents for change and social progress. Gender mainstreaming must be made a central pillar of policy strategy, in particular with regard to attaining the MDGs in such areas as eliminating poverty and combating HIV/AIDS. Lasting social change cannot be realized until women are fully incorporated into the process.

The urgency, complexity and scope of the three pillars of the work of the United Nations — peace and security, development and human rights — demand the highest standards of efficient, effective and accountable management. The highly decentralized nature of the United Nations system puts a premium on coherence and coordination. We must streamline the United Nations machinery, reorganize priorities and minimize redundancy. The High-level Panel on United Nations System-wide Coherence may offer some fresh ideas in that regard.

A number of valuable ideas for reforming United Nations management practices were contained in the Secretary-General's report (A/60/692) entitled "Investing in the United Nations". Some of those proposals have already been adopted by the General Assembly, while others await further consideration during this session.

The Secretary-General's comments on the evolving nature of the human resource needs of the United Nations were especially apt in the light of the accelerating demands for field staff. The General Assembly should give positive consideration to steps to make the Secretariat more mobile, integrated and multi-skilled. The United Nations needs to be able to deploy the best people where they are needed and when they are needed, to ensure that managers have the requisite expertise and experience to oversee highly dynamic and professional operations under often trying conditions.

Improving the accountability and oversight of the Secretariat while building upon the measures already taken over the past year remains a priority. The early launch of an independent audit advisory committee that is genuinely independent and professional, along with steps to ensure management accountability, would be instrumental in that regard.

The United Nations procurement system requires strengthened internal controls and transparent management to match the growing dimensions of its work.

As Member States and stakeholders in this vital Organization, we should address mandate review as a historic opportunity to streamline, focus and strengthen our collective efforts.

This unique world body was forged by men and women of conscience, courage and determination. Their genius was to understand that we need the United Nations not because we always agree but because frequently we do not. The United Nations remains no more and no less than what we make of it. The United Nations journey is never easy, but it is always well worth taking. We have come a very long way, but the road still stretches out endlessly before us. I have every confidence that, with the founding principles and purposes as our guideposts, and empowered by renewed faith and commitment, we can together go very far and fast in the challenging and exciting times to come.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Sergey Lavrov, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation.

Mr. Lavrov (Russian Federation) (spoke in Russian): Traditionally, the General Assembly session provides an opportunity to conduct a review of the

current situation in the world, identify major international issues and determine the role that the United Nations could play in resolving them.

I believe that we have every reason to conclude that there is a prevailing trend of growing awareness of the need to strengthen the collective foundations of international politics, as well as of the fact that there is no alternative to tackling problems through multilateral diplomacy. That trend is based on objective facts, for it reflects the realities of an emerging multipolar architecture of international relations. It is logical, because answers to global challenges and threats can only be found collectively. Finally, it is a manifestation of historical continuity, because we are revisiting the same objective as the founding fathers of the United Nations were determined to pursue by enshrining in the Charter the principles for a system of collective security.

It is precisely such an approach, firmly grounded in international law, that can ensure the world's sustainable development in this era of globalization. That requires a strengthened central role for the universal Organization in every area of international life.

We must of course continue to adapt the mechanisms and methods of the United Nations to the new environment. Much has been done as follow-up to the decisions of the 2005 World Summit: The Peacebuilding Commission and the Human Rights Council have been established, and the reform process has been extended to management.

It is important that all our further work be based upon the fundamental principle of the universality of the United Nations. Patterns contrary to the Charter of the United Nations that exclude individual States or groups of States from participating meaningfully in the activities of the Organization or that introduce a single system of values into the work of the Secretariat are unsustainable. Let us not forget that the United Nations belongs to us all. Moreover, administrative reform should not lead to the bureaucracy taking over the management of the Organization, thereby jeopardizing the intergovernmental nature of the United Nations.

A trend towards collective action has also spread beyond the structures of the United Nations. During Russia's presidency of the Group of Eight (G-8), there was greater interaction between the G-8 and other leading countries and international organizations. Over

the past 12 months our dialogue partners have actively contributed to Saint Petersburg summit documents on every main agenda item, including global energy security, education and controlling infectious diseases.

A new and genuinely collaborative type of interaction between the G-8 and Africa is now emerging in this era of globalization, as the needs of the continent are reflected in the mainstream of world development rather than being viewed as issues divorced from overall trends.

The G-8 does not have a monopoly over the decisions taken at Saint Petersburg. All States are invited to participate in their implementation.

Regional organizations and cooperation and coordination between those organizations and the United Nations have also strengthened in maintaining international peace and security. Issues pertaining to that were discussed yesterday at the special ministerial meeting of the Security Council (see S/PV.5529). Once again, we are dealing here with an important dimension of collective action by the international community.

The Commonwealth of Independent States has made a significant contribution to such interaction. To address common problems, specific actions have been taken within the Commonwealth area, primarily within the Eurasian Economic Community and the Collective Security Treaty Organization. Further substantive and resolute efforts are being made in the context of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, which developed and launched an initiative to establish a partnership network for multilateral organizations in the Asia-Pacific region. Development patterns in that region will largely determine the future contours of our planet.

Multilateral institutions in Latin America have also become stronger, and the development of the African Union is gaining momentum.

At their recent Summit in Havana, heads of State of the countries of the Non-Aligned Movement expressed their support for a collective search — within the context of the central role of the United Nations — for agreed solutions to problems confronting the world community.

Europe, of course, is not outside the common trend towards collective examination and resolution of common problems. In that connection, we also see growing awareness of the fact that security and prosperity are indivisible. We expect NATO to

transform itself from a defence alliance into something more contemporary that would be in line with principles of transparency and collective response and based upon a universal legal foundation.

We have been watching with keen interest the emerging foreign policy and security mechanisms of the European Union. Russia is prepared to cooperate with multilateral structures in the Euro-Atlantic space and other regions of the world. In fact, we already have effective common mechanisms with many of them.

Collective efforts are also needed to further develop international law, primarily within the context of countering new threats. The United Nations Global Counter-terrorism Strategy (resolution 60/288), which was recently adopted by consensus, is an important contribution in terms of strengthening the legal basis for the anti-terrorist coalition and ensuring a comprehensive approach to counter-terrorism. It is not only about countering all terrorist manifestations and ideologies, it is also about eliminating the problems that give rise to terrorism. The next step will be to agree upon a comprehensive anti-terrorism convention.

It is necessary to secure the achievements that have been made by taking practical steps. In the course of Russia's presidency of the G-8, the Second Ministerial Conference on Drug Trafficking Routes From Afghanistan was held, where additional measures were approved aimed at mobilizing the international community to counter the terrorism-related drug threat originating from Afghanistan. Another international meeting will be held in Moscow next November to focus on developing modalities for government-business partnerships in countering terrorism.

What is needed today are more proactive measures to prevent lethal weapons from falling into the hands of non-State actors, as well as the consistent implementation of Security Council resolution 1540 (2004) and other counter-terrorism resolutions of the Council. The Russia-United States global initiative to combat nuclear terrorism, which was launched at Saint Petersburg by Presidents Vladimir V. Putin and George W. Bush last July, should be an important tool in preventing a linkage between weapons of mass destruction and terrorism. That initiative invites interested States to act collectively.

The ever-growing demand for the unique peacekeeping capabilities of the United Nations also calls for a collective effort. Not all of those capabilities

have been utilized to the fullest. Utilizing the capabilities of the Military Staff Committee, as well as those of regional organizations, on the basis of the relevant provisions of the United Nations Charter would be helpful.

It is encouraging to see a more active role being played by Africans themselves in peacemaking operations in Africa — an undertaking spearheaded by the African Union and supported by the United Nations.

In a number of crisis situations conditions are gradually emerging for a transition to post-conflict reconstruction. It is our hope that the Declaration on Cooperation and Future Action in Stabilization and Reconstruction adopted at the Saint Petersburg G-8 Summit will help us complement the efforts of the United Nations and regional organizations at this critically important period of transition to peacebuilding.

A comprehensive settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict remains a central task for the world community. Many of today's threats have come together in that region, and the key to resolving them is most often to be found there. In that connection, I should first like to mention the truly global challenge posed by the need to prevent a schism between civilizations.

We welcome the emerging prospects for a national agreement in the Palestinian territories, as well as for the resumption of the Palestinian-Israeli talks. It is important to continue to encourage the parties to meet their respective obligations, with the clear understanding that any progress towards the objectives set out by the international community will inevitably be gradual and that any attempt to act in an all-or-nothing spirit will be counterproductive and could once again plunge the region into confrontation.

The recent war in Lebanon demonstrated the great fragility of the situation in the Middle East and the acute need for a comprehensive approach along all tracks. That presupposes the involvement of all countries and parties. Without their participation it will be impossible to reach any viable negotiated solution. It is also clear that the road to comprehensive peace will not be an easy one, but now is the time. The initiative of the League of Arab States to convene an international conference should contribute to finding the proper framework for that undertaking. The Quartet

of international mediators should also make a key contribution to the process.

A breakthrough on a Middle East settlement could provide the positive momentum so wanting in the region. It could also facilitate the solution of other burning problems in the region and in neighbouring countries. That is particularly true as regards efforts aimed at stabilizing the situation in Iraq, where attempts to contain wanton violence and chaos have thus far proved unsuccessful. Dozens of people, mainly civilians, continue to die in Iraq every day. Five officials of the Russian embassy in Baghdad have also fallen victim to that barbarous massacre. A resolution in Iraq will be possible only through concerted efforts. That requires the involvement in the political process of all major Iraqi interests and the implementation of the plans of that country's Government to reach genuine national accord, with the concerted support of the international community, including all of Iraq's neighbours.

We are, unfortunately, now witnessing growing significance of the use of force in world affairs; that undermines non-proliferation regimes. The feeling of a lack of predictability and stability in the area of security is becoming ever more pronounced. Against that background, the growing interest of many States in nuclear energy may give rise to concerns, given the trend towards the global proliferation of sensitive technologies.

Apart from current resolute steps to find negotiated solutions to individual problems — such as the Iranian nuclear programme and the problem of the Korean peninsula — there is a need for an urgent effort by the entire international community to systematically strengthen non-proliferation regimes on a generally acceptable basis, while ensuring that the benefits of peaceful atomic energy are legitimately accessible to all States.

President Vladimir V. Putin's initiative to establish multilateral centres for nuclear fuel-cycle services, along with similar ideas proposed by the leadership of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and proposals put forth by United States President George W. Bush, have found support among G-8 leaders. We are confident that the development and practical implementation of such approaches — in cooperation with all countries with an interest in modern and safe nuclear energy — will make it

possible to resolve non-proliferation issues in a non-confrontational manner.

As in other areas, the obsession with sanctions — applied without calculating their consequences — might produce unpredictable results. It is absolutely necessary to eliminate the loopholes in the non-proliferation regimes, but that should be done through clear and non-discriminatory approaches, without creating grounds for suspicion regarding the existence of some hidden agenda.

Stagnation in the international disarmament process does not help to resolve non-proliferation problems. Here again, we need concerted action, for this is a matter of collective security.

In the area of strategic arms, the United States-Russian agreements play an enormously important role. Their significance goes far beyond the framework of bilateral relations, considering that virtually all members of the international community benefit from strategic stability. We support the consistent development of the United States-Russian bilateral disarmament process, as was stated by our Presidents in Saint Petersburg in July.

Closely related to that are issues related to anti-ballistic missiles, in particular within the context of the existing plans of the United States. In that context, there is a need for complete transparency and for an analysis of the consequences for strategic stability.

The situation surrounding the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe continues to cause grave concern. The old Treaty, based on the realities of confrontation between military blocs, has lost its relevance, while NATO is blocking the entry into force of the Agreement on its adaptation.

At the same time, reconfiguration of the military architecture on the European continent is under way. At its heart is an expanding military alliance. Such virtual arms control becomes meaningless as it turns into a one-way street.

It is also necessary to revitalize multilateral disarmament approaches. That agenda should include the entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, non-deployment of weapons in outer space, conclusion of a fissile material cut-off treaty and ensuring information security. Nuclear-weapon-free zones play an important role, and we welcome the creation of such a zone in Central Asia.

The overall task is to reinvigorate the efforts of the international community in the area of disarmament and arms control, within the framework of the Conference on Disarmament and other relevant United Nations bodies.

The 2005 World Summit unanimously reaffirmed that peace, security and development are inseparable. With that in mind, we are prepared to engage in collective discussions and support further joint pragmatic steps with a view to improving the efficiency of the social and economic activities of the entire United Nations system.

The Russian Federation realizes its responsibility as one of the fastest growing economies of the world, and is devoting increasing attention to development assistance. Thus far, Russia has written off or has undertaken to write off \$11.3 billion of the debt of African countries, including more than \$2.2 billion within the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Debt Initiative. New steps are planned in that area. Russia now ranks third in absolute figures of debt relief and first in terms of the ratio of debt relief to gross domestic product. We have also increased our contributions to other international development assistance mechanisms, including through United Nations institutions and funds and the Bretton Woods institutions.

Today, I cannot fail to express my sincere appreciation and praise to the Secretary-General Kofi Annan. For many years, during the most difficult times for world politics, he has carried out his duties with dignity. Thanks largely to the efforts of Kofi Annan and to his ability to take the lead while remaining a realist in the face of severe challenges, we have managed to make progress in strengthening the United Nations.

Today the United Nations is relevant as never before. We do not have to create it anew. In the course of reforming the United Nations in accordance with the dictates of the time, it is incumbent upon us all to reaffirm by action our commitment to the world Organization, which draws its strength from our trust in it and in its unique legitimacy. Without the United Nations and its Charter to rely upon, it would prove impossible to ensure a more reliable and democratic system of collective security that would respond to the dictates of our time.

The Acting President: It gives me particular pleasure to give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Bernard Rudolf Bot, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands.

Mr. Bot (Netherlands): Five years after the destruction of the Twin Towers and just a few days after the commemoration of that terrible tragedy, I would like to extend my deepest sympathy to the people of this great city, which serves as mankind's meeting point.

Last year, I stressed our collective responsibility to protect tolerance from intolerance. I spoke of freedom of expression and freedom of religion. Today I should like to revisit that theme. But, in addition, I will discuss the relationship between fighting terrorism and respecting human rights, the search for peace in the Middle East and reform of the United Nations. Moreover, I will renew my call for intensified dialogue. Only dialogue at all levels of society leads to more knowledge about one another — and often to more mutual understanding.

The threat of terrorism has not subsided. To fully understand the nature of the challenge we face, we have to ask ourselves what terrorists are aiming for. They aspire to undermine a society based on democracy, fundamental freedoms, human rights and the quest for progress. In their view, there is no place for the principles and tenets of our free society. Instead, they try by means of terror and violence to impose their views of the world on others.

As to the means used by terrorists, there can be no doubt that large-scale and systematic terrorist acts qualify as crimes against humanity under international law. While civilized societies uphold international legal and moral standards in defending themselves, terrorists completely reject the central principles of international law. Our campaign against this threat must be fought with great determination by all of us. Indiscriminate violence must be countered by the collective will to defend our values, in order to protect our civilization and human dignity.

In order for this campaign to be successful in the long run, we must also place great emphasis on development, fair trade and dialogue. Unlike those who have prospects for a better life through access to education and jobs, people without prospects and without a voice are more easily lured by the siren call of hatred. To deal with that issue is one of the core

missions of the United Nations. We — all nations of the United Nations — have a collective responsibility to give people a future and a voice so that they can improve their lives.

Extremists cleverly seek to exploit the freedom of open societies with the aim of destroying that very freedom. This confronts us with a dilemma: do we close our societies in self-defence, thus becoming more like the evil we face, or do we remain open societies and accept a certain degree of vulnerability? Anti-terrorism measures can be effective only if adopted within the context of the human rights commitments we have undertaken. Ultimately, our defence should not come at the expense of the very values upon which our societies are founded. Our citizens must be able to distinguish between the societies in which they lead productive lives and the terrorist movements for which human life has little value. I am happy with the agreement we reached on the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy (resolution 60/288). But now, we must see to its implementation. It is also in our collective interest to conclude a terrorism convention as well.

The need for interfaith and intercultural dialogue is as great as ever. During and after the so-called cartoon crisis, I engaged in discussions with colleagues and the media in Asia and the Middle East. We talked about freedom of expression and freedom of religion, and I discovered that such personal efforts are crucial in finding common ground. One of the initiatives we have taken is to host the annual Asia-Europe Meeting conference on interfaith dialogue in Amsterdam in 2008.

For any interfaith dialogue to be meaningful, respect for diversity is a precondition. In our view, all of the world's nationalities, religions and beliefs should live side by side, united by a tradition of pluralism, democracy and the rule of law. According to international instruments to which we all subscribe, respect for diversity means, for example, freedom of religion and belief. That includes the freedom to adhere to any religion, or to no religion at all. In my country — and in many others as well — an individual is free to be a Christian, Muslim, Jew or Hindu or to adhere to any other belief. This philosophy includes the right to change one's belief, as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights clearly states.

We believe that the separation of Church and State and the independence of the courts are the best guarantees that nobody has the power to impose his or her beliefs on others. Freedom of religion and freedom of expression are two sides of the same coin. Does this mean that people can say whatever they want? No. The right to free speech does not entitle a person to insult others. But restrictions on the freedom of expression must never go further than what is necessary within a democratic society. In individual cases where freedom of expression conflicts with legitimate restrictions, it is up to the courts, not the Government, to decide which principle should prevail.

Peace in the Middle East would reinforce a global spirit of dialogue. We have reason to be optimistic. Security Council resolution 1701 (2006) ended hostilities between Hizbollah and Israel, unfortunately only after many innocent civilians had lost their lives. I commend the Secretary-General for his tireless efforts to promote the resolution's effective implementation.

The renewed United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) is an important symbol of hope. Peacekeepers of different religious and cultural backgrounds are working together under the sky-blue banner of the United Nations, as they have been doing in the Great Lakes region in Africa and will hopefully soon be doing in Darfur, the Sudan. I am proud of the fact that several States members of the European Union, together with Turkey, China and Indonesia, provide the backbone of UNIFIL. The Netherlands is actively considering contributing to UNIFIL's maritime component. Practical implementation will depend on the cooperation of all parties and countries in the region, and beyond, including Syria and Iran. I call upon them to act in accordance with Security Council resolution 1701 (2006).

Regional peace also requires resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the Israeli-Syrian dispute. I call upon all parties involved to seize the political momentum created by Council resolution 1701 (2006) and engage in serious dialogue. The Quartet could, at the request of the Security Council, outline a comprehensive Middle East settlement.

In this world, we need the United Nations to manage change, rather than lag behind. We need to renew and reinvigorate the United Nations. Last year's Summit was devoted to that very task. We have made substantial progress since then, but more needs to be

done. My country's vision of an effective United Nations includes less fragmentation, more concentration and more synergy. We need a United Nations that cuts red tape, rather than one that creates more bureaucracy. For example, in an interdependent world, it makes no sense to have 38 different United Nations humanitarian and development agencies. That is why we have suggested one office, one programme, one representative and one financial mechanism at the country level.

My vision of the United Nations encompasses a Peacebuilding Commission that focuses on critical peacebuilding needs and a Human Rights Council that is the single most authoritative voice on human rights. It is a United Nations led by a Secretary-General with greater authority to determine the optimal use of human and other resources than is the case at present.

As an active Member of the United Nations, the Netherlands will continue to contribute to the best of its ability to turn this vision into reality. The Netherlands does not just preach; it delivers. For more than 60 years, ever since the foundation of the United Nations, we have provided means, ideas and people. And, of course, we remain committed to its cause.

Security Council reform is a difficult part of the overall United Nations reform agenda. A pragmatic approach would be to opt for a temporary solution that could be modified after, say, 10 years. The world is dynamic and the Security Council's composition should reflect this. The geopolitical realities of today might not necessarily be the geopolitical realities of tomorrow.

We should focus on the longer-term gains we all benefit from, rather than on short-term progress at the expense of others. Let us work to make the United Nations operate in a less antagonistic way. We have successfully tried this approach in the Group of Friends for the Reform of the United Nations, in which different countries, including the Netherlands, engage in constructive debate to arrive at solutions that are acceptable to all.

The United Nations is beset by problems that require major reforms. We are united by the opportunities and challenges of our time. In promoting peace and stability, in debating human rights issues, or in combating extreme poverty, we are compelled to work together and to coordinate our actions. Let us adopt a twenty-first-century mentality to address

twenty-first-century problems. Now is the time to align our agendas and shoulder our responsibilities together. A strong United Nations strengthens us all.

Finally, I would like to express my deepest appreciation to Secretary-General Kofi Annan for the commitment and determination he has shown in pursuit of a better world, with a United Nations that works effectively for the security, safety and well-being of people everywhere. Even the rocks of which he spoke seemed a light burden under his stewardship. We commend him for achieving tangible results in the area of crisis management and conflict prevention and for furthering the Millennium Development Goals. Secretary-General Annan's personal performance has brought hope and optimism to the hearts of citizens all over the world.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Alexander Downer, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Australia.

Mr. Downer (Australia): I would like to begin by joining with my colleagues in congratulating Ms. Haya Rashed Al-Khalifa on her election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its sixty-first session. I am also delighted to welcome Montenegro as the 192nd Member of the United Nations.

I also note that this will be the tenth and, indeed, the final General Assembly for the Secretary-General. I want to congratulate him on his important contribution to the United Nations over his term and also throughout his United Nations career. He has been a very good colleague of Australia throughout that time. He has been a determined advocate for peace, development and United Nations reform, and we wish him well in the future.

Earlier this month, on the day before the fifth anniversary of the 9/11 attacks against the United States, a man called Hakim Taniwal was murdered by a suicide bomber in Afghanistan.

Mr. Taniwal was the Governor of Paktia province in eastern Afghanistan. He was a scholarly, gentle-spoken man of integrity — a good man, with a reputation as a highly capable administrator. As well as being an Afghani, Mr. Taniwal was an Australian. He lived in exile in my country for some years and built a new life for his family.

But when Afghanistan was liberated from the Taliban in the wake of 9/11, Mr. Taniwal returned to

help rebuild his homeland. He worked for the betterment of his fellow Afghans by adopting a forward-looking model of public administration, far removed from the Taliban narrative of rule by fear. For his trouble, the Taliban had him killed. His nephew died alongside him. A few days later, compounding atrocity upon atrocity, a second suicide bomber attacked Mr. Taniwal's funeral ceremony, killing and injuring many more people.

The task of rebuilding Afghanistan, in the face of such atrocities, is demanding great sacrifices on the part of tens of thousands of brave men and women. It is a country in which many of the great challenges of our time intersect: how to free its cities, towns and villages from the daily threat of violence; how to ensure that an extremist ideology never again subjugates the country's institutions; and how to create the conditions for stability and good governance so necessary to economic renewal and so crucial if its people are to escape poverty and oppression.

Afghanistan represents a fundamental test for each of us. If we are not resolute and steadfast in supporting Afghanistan against the scourge of terrorism, and if we are not prepared collectively to stand up against the extremists, we will deliver to coming generations a weak international system and a far less secure and stable world.

Iraq is another of the front lines in this battle. I acknowledge here the divided views of United Nations Member States over the military action against the regime of Saddam Hussein in 2003, yet today there is a very clear choice that should unite us all.

The extremists have chosen to make Iraq a battleground. Osama bin Laden has said that Iraq is "for you or for us to win". We know what will come of Iraq if it is won by the extremists. As in Afghanistan, we must all commit to securing its future. Iraq is not America's burden alone, and Afghanistan is not NATO's burden alone, because if terrorism prevailed, the consequences would be catastrophic for each of us, wherever we may live.

This struggle will be protracted. Our challenge is not just to keep our citizens safe from terrorist attack; it is also to defeat an ideology that allows for no ideas or belief systems other than its own. It is imperative we see this ideology clearly for what it is: a mindset every bit as brutal and uncompromising as its totalitarian predecessors in centuries past. It is an ideology that

directly challenges the principles and values of modernity — the flourishing of open markets, open societies and open minds. To defeat this evil, we must harness the collective strength of the international community.

I welcome the recent agreement on the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, but I am disappointed that the Strategy's illustrative list of conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism did not include extremist ideologies.

Ms. Grabar-Kitarović (Croatia), Vice-President, took the Chair.

We need to do much more. States should conclude a comprehensive convention on international terrorism. That would demonstrate an unambiguous commitment, ensuring that all terrorist acts are criminalized in international law. It is disappointing that the United Nations still cannot agree on the scope of such a convention.

More disturbingly, some countries continue to sponsor terrorist groups to promote their own political agendas. In the Middle East, it is essential that all countries, including Iran and Syria, use their influence over organizations such as Hezbollah to stop terrorist assaults, including those directed at the State of Israel. Any viable resolution of the conflict must include Hezbollah's disarmament, its renunciation of violence and a recognition of Israel's right to exist in peace.

In all of this, the United Nations has a role to play. But, as I have said before in this Hall, the United Nations is not the answer to all the problems of the world. Where the United Nations cannot act, individual States must. Our membership in the United Nations does not absolve any of us from the responsibility to show leadership and to pursue practical solutions.

Too often in the world of politics, the temptation is for Governments to strike an attitude and then leave the substantive action for another day, or to offload the responsibility onto others. We can make solemn pledges — as we should, and we do — to work much harder to assist developing nations in confronting the ravages of poverty and disease. We can sign high-minded manifestos to protect our environment from the risk of climate change. Alongside global security, these are two issues crucial to our collective future. But so much of the talk is mere artifice unless backed up by

resolute, practical and well-constructed policy responses.

In Australia's region, practical and effective cooperation has exemplified the counter-terrorism response. A regional training centre jointly established by Indonesia and Australia is helping South-East Asian law enforcement agencies develop the capabilities they need to destroy terrorist networks. Other recent initiatives, such as interfaith dialogues, are promoting tolerance and mutual understanding.

Practical and effective cooperation has also been the hallmark of our commitment to East Timor. Australian Defence Force personnel and police worked with their counterparts from New Zealand, Malaysia and Portugal to restore order after the April riots. We remain ready to continue to provide a significant "green helmet" military contingent in East Timor to complement the United Nations police force mandated under Security Council resolution 1704 (2006).

Elsewhere in our region, Australia has joined in a partnership with 14 other Pacific countries in a Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI). RAMSI is not just about restoring law and order; some 150 advisers are working with the Solomon Islands Government, helping to stabilize finances, revitalize the public service and strengthen the justice and prison systems. None of these tasks is easy, and much more remains to be done, but the hard work has begun, and we are making headway.

In contrast, the tragedy of Darfur poses a grievous challenge to the international community. Darfur is a litmus test of the responsibility of the United Nations to help people who desperately need its protection. It is a test of the most basic principles of civilization. We all know this. We also know it is a test that, so far, the United Nations has failed.

In this Hall last year, we assumed a solemn responsibility to protect those who have no means of protecting themselves. The United Nations itself must now redouble its efforts to try to prevent any further bloodshed in Darfur, which has already claimed well in excess of 200,000 lives and brought about the displacement of millions of persons. The United Nations must keep its promise to the people of Darfur. It is no less than they should expect and no less than we would demand.

The desperation of Darfur reminds us also of the immense challenges of development. Members of the United Nations have recognized this through the Millennium Development Goals. Aid is important, and last year Australia committed itself to doubling our annual aid budget to about \$4 billion a year by 2010. Australia has recently sharpened the focus of our development assistance programme on supporting good governance, basic social services and security in developing countries. In the South Pacific, we will sponsor new programmes to train people in technical and entrepreneurial skills.

But increasing aid and reducing debt burdens alone will not reduce poverty. Economic growth is central to poverty alleviation. The World Bank estimates that the number of people living on less than \$2 a day in East Asia fell by around 280 million between 2001 and 2005. The policies and actions of developing countries in creating an enabling environment for economic growth are fundamental to advances on this front. Likewise, free and open trade and investment are pivotal. The failure of the Doha Round of multilateral trade talks would be a cruel rebuff to the world's poor. The World Bank estimates that a strong outcome of the Round could lift an additional 32 million people out of poverty by 2015.

We cannot underpin sustainable economic development without protecting the environment on which we depend. Biodiversity loss, land clearing, deforestation and climate change present threats to the common good that can best be overcome through collective action.

But collective action entails much more than adopting resolutions and signing treaties. Fine words and high aspirations may give us a sense that we are acting to stop environmental degradation, but they are of little benefit unless backed by practical action. Domestic implementation of environmental commitments has not been sufficient, and the gap between words and action remains too wide.

Climate change is an area where we must move beyond blind faith in a single multilateral approach. The great challenge is to address climate change without jeopardizing economic growth, particularly in developing countries. We need to work towards a more inclusive and effective international approach to climate change. The existing efforts are not enough; we

need to bring forward new ideas, not constrained by ideology.

The focus of the Asia-Pacific Partnership on Clean Development and Climate is the development and transfer of cleaner energy-generating technologies. The Partnership brings together Australia, the United States, Japan, China, India and the Republic of Korea. Together, those countries account for about half of the world's gross domestic product, population, energy use and greenhouse gas emissions. The aim of the Partnership is to bring developed and developing countries together with the private sector to deploy technologies — be they renewable energy or carbon storage — to help reduce the dangers of climate change, while not stalling economic growth and development.

Effective international action on the great global challenges of our time requires more than resolutions at the United Nations. It requires the exercise of strong leadership by individual nations. It requires proactive policy, not political posturing or personal abuse from this rostrum. It requires a rigorous search for sound and practical long-term solutions.

As Members of the United Nations, we have pledged to unite our strengths to maintain international peace and security. But, equally, we cannot abrogate to the United Nations the responsibility that we have, as individual States, for security and good governance within our borders and within our regions. History will judge us harshly if we do not shoulder that responsibility.

The Acting President: I now call on Her Excellency Ms. Ursula Plassnik, Federal Minister for Foreign Affairs of Austria.

Ms. Plassnik (Austria): "United in diversity": this motto of the European Union expresses what we, the 25 — and soon to be 27 — member States of the European Union, demand from ourselves, as well as our aspirations for the United Nations. "United in diversity" is also a concrete management principle of our practical, everyday work to promote justice, peace, freedom and prosperity. As the host country to the only United Nations headquarters within the European Union, as President of the European Union during the first six months of 2006 and as a venue for the dialogue of religions and cultures, Austria has consistently aimed at translating this principle into practice, including by providing peacekeepers, despite recent

bitter experiences such as the tragic death of Major Hans-Peter Lang while he was serving the United Nations in southern Lebanon.

By establishing the Human Rights Council in Geneva and the Peacebuilding Commission, we have given ourselves new instruments for carrying out an important part of our work in this phase of United Nations reform. Austria thanks Jan Eliasson, President of the General Assembly at its sixtieth session, for his vision, tenacity and endurance. We owe it to his negotiating skills that institutional reform of the United Nations has been decisively set in motion. We pledge to devote the necessary determination to the reform measures that still need to be implemented, such as management reform, the review of United Nations mandates and the establishment of a rule of law assistance unit.

Today, after decades of division, Europe is growing together again. That is the major achievement of the European Union. We have come a long way. The iron curtain is a relic of the past. Today, we want the countries of South-East Europe and the Balkans to take their rightful place in Europe and to be included in the reunification process of our continent. The European experience is, profoundly, an experience of overcoming old and bitter conflicts and of the power of patient and peaceful transformation.

Here, I wish to welcome to the General Assembly the newest European member and the 192nd Member of the United Nations, the Republic of Montenegro.

In Europe, difficult issues need to be solved. Tomorrow, the Security Council will discuss the future status of Kosovo. Austria supports the efforts of President Martti Ahtisaari and his team in Vienna. As neighbours and friends, we urge both Belgrade and Pristina to engage in these negotiations constructively, in a results-oriented manner and with the necessary sense of realism. Our goal is a democratic and multi-ethnic Kosovo whose citizens can all live in security and dignity on the basis of mutual trust. In the same spirit, a confident, peaceful and prosperous Serbia, fully integrated into the family of European nations, is crucial for the stability of the whole region.

In the Middle East, innocent civilians still suffer from the disastrous consequences of terror attacks and the indiscriminate use of force. Men, women and children on all sides must be given a real chance to live

in peace and in an atmosphere of increasing mutual trust.

The goal that Austria pursues in its relations with the Middle East is to realize the vision of Palestinians and Israelis living side by side in security as neighbours in two States, working towards a peaceful and economically successful common future. We know that the path towards that goal is rocky, but now we have reached a turning point. In the aftermath of the armed conflict in Lebanon, all parties in the region have agreed on the need for renewed engagement on the part of the international community. The European Union and its member States can and will make a substantive contribution.

However, international efforts can only support — not serve as a substitute for — efforts by Israel and the Palestinians. That is why we welcome the efforts of President Abbas to form a Government of national unity in the Palestinian territories and the recent high-level, direct contacts. Yesterday's statement by the Middle East Quartet — in which the United Nations plays such a central role — is another encouraging signal. We hope that those decisions will help to alleviate the plight of the Palestinian people and to move the political process forward.

Austria is convinced that the work of the Middle East Quartet should now pave the way towards a major peace initiative. We see great merit in an international Middle East conference along the lines of the 1991 Madrid Conference. We believe that such a forum should be open to regional partners willing to participate constructively in search of a comprehensive peace settlement. A conference of that kind could also examine the longer-term potential for regional security arrangements.

As the Secretary-General has rightly pointed out, Africa must remain one of our main priorities. In particular, we must engage to prevent a humanitarian catastrophe in Darfur. It is simply unacceptable that not even relief agencies are given access to help those most in need. It is deeply disturbing that there is no clear perspective for an end to fighting and suffering in the region. As many others, we urgently call upon the Government of the Sudan to accept the deployment of a United Nations peacekeeping force in Darfur without delay.

Austria is deeply aware of the need for the dialogue of cultures and religions. This is because my

country lies at the crossroads of many different cultures, at the heart of a continent marked by centuries of dividing lines. Our own difficult experience has certainly taught us that mutual tolerance and respect are universal values, which we must all uphold and that religious beliefs, by their very nature, must never be misused to justify violence.

In view of our own experience, we are also convinced that the dialogue of religions and cultures is not a challenge confined only to the international field; this dialogue begins at home, within our own societies. Here, as well as at the global level, "United in diversity" must be our guiding principle. We have to keep our work down to earth. We have to find answers on how best to organize living together and provide orientation in a rapidly globalizing world that many regard as a menace. Ultimately, it is in the work place, at school, in defining the role of women in society, in seeking to create opportunities for young people and in the media that we decide about the outcome of the dialogue of cultures in real-life terms.

I am therefore convinced that we must better integrate the dialogue of religions and cultures in the everyday work of the United Nations. This is a topic that we cannot leave to the street. The minefield of collective emotions is not a good place to discuss questions of belief. Complex feelings of frustration, humiliation and neglect can erupt in violence at the slightest trigger. In a world where connections are established by a single mouse click, reactions arrive within minutes. Here, we need to counteract on the basis of our common values, in full conformity with universal human rights and basic freedoms, as they are the very foundation of our work here at the United Nations.

In the 61 years of the United Nations, this is only the third time that a woman has presided over the General Assembly, and the first woman to do so coming from the Arab world. While we congratulate her personally on her election to this high position, Austria also regards this election as a signal to all women in the world: the time has come for women to take their rightful place in all spheres of public life. We are called upon to engage politically at all levels, from the community level to the United Nations. The voices of women need to be heard more clearly in the work of the United Nations. Women know what holds families, communities and societies together. This age-old knowledge in all its modern variety and colour should

not be left untapped, in particular in peace processes. In United Nations missions, at the negotiation table, in decision-making processes and not only as voices in the background. During its presidency of the European Union, Austria, in its recruitment strategy, consistently aimed at deploying women in European Union peace missions. In addition, we elaborated guidelines for European Union missions on how to best comply with the special needs of children.

In his address to the General Assembly at its 10th meeting, on 19 September, the Secretary-General rightly said, "It is shameful that last year's Summit Outcome does not contain even one word about non-proliferation and disarmament". Austria calls for a renewed commitment of the international community to these security goals. We also offer to host the next preparatory meeting for the Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons in Vienna in the spring of 2007.

Development and the preservation of our livelihoods require sustainable solutions. Among the great global challenges we are facing is climate change. Global warming is real. Austria is committed to do her part in combating it. However, in Austria's view, nuclear energy is not the right answer; it bears too many risks and uncertainties to be regarded as a safe and sustainable source of energy.

Solidarity is at the heart of the United Nations: solidarity with the poor, the weak and the powerless. Here, the United Nations task list for the coming years is rich with promise: achieving the Millennium Development Goals in full, concluding the Doha Development Round, fighting against hunger, disease, poverty and exclusion.

On Tuesday, we launched the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy with a clear message: the international community is united against this scourge of humanity. We will not tolerate terrorism in any form or manifestation. And we will redouble our efforts to dry up the breeding grounds from which terrorism feeds itself. Let me in this context point out the excellent work of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime in Vienna, with its Global Programme against Terrorism, in delivering technical assistance to Member States.

It is out of respect for diversity and in recognition of the need for unity that Austria has presented its candidature for a non-permanent seat on the Security

Council for the period 2009-2010. With this in mind, we have made the rule of law the backbone of our candidature.

Let me close by conveying Austria's appreciation for the great personality who has been standing at the helm of this Organization for the past decade, for Kofi Annan, the statesman and the person. We thank the Secretary-General, in particular for being a tireless encourager, despite the considerable obstacles he has had to face at times. He is a role model for dignity and confidence. He is always ready to speak out, in his soft but firm voice, for those whose voices are not strong enough or loud enough to be heard; to give voice to the weak, the poor, the small and those who feel lost or abandoned. Mr. Secretary-General, the world will continue listening to your voice as it is the voice of hope and steadfastness.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Miguel Angel Moratinos Cuyaubé, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Spain.

Mr. Moratinos Cuyaubé (Spain) (spoke in Spanish): It is indeed a great pleasure to address this General Assembly on the International Day of Peace, in my capacity as Minister for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation. The Government of Spain calls for a vigorous United Nations system that can guarantee international peace and security in a world that is global, complex and full of uncertainty.

I should like to congratulate our President on her election as the first Arab woman to lead the Assembly — a task in which, I predict, she will have great success. She can count on the full commitment and cooperation of Spain. I also wish to express my gratitude and congratulations to Mr. Jan Eliasson, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Sweden and President of the General Assembly at its most recent session. His leadership and negotiating skills contributed to the adoption of far-reaching political agreements aimed at the implementation of the 2005 World Summit Outcome (resolution 60/1).

Understanding and cooperation among countries will clear up the unanswered questions of the twenty-first century — a century characterized by globalization, which has spread throughout the world, pervading areas of daily life and causing transformations in the power of States and the system of international relations.

In their analysis of that complex and uncertain reality, political theoreticians sometimes turn to scientific knowledge, but its formulations fail to provide concrete measures to deal effectively with the political and institutional challenges of the twenty-first century. New times call for new politics that cannot be influenced in any way by fear, distrust or suspicion in the international community. The factors and events that shape today's international relations must not distract or hold back the innovative spirit of political action.

Today, we know that technology alone does not lead to progress with regard to security and social and economic growth. Globalization has great individual and collective benefits. It is a mixture of contradictory trends — hope and despair, humanism and barbarity — in which we find serious imbalances that must be addressed with political courage and confidence.

This new era has not resolved old conflicts that are eroding international peace and security. The situation in the Middle East is the present-day version of a historical conflict that has challenged the international community. The adoption of Security Council resolution 1701 (2006) and the cessation of hostilities open the way for hope that the necessary conditions will be created for a lasting peace. We have already endured more than five decades of suffering and despair. We have already endured five decades of appealing in this forum for a definitive solution. We have endured five decades of the international community's impotence.

From this rostrum, I call for a coalition for peace. This is not about rediscovering the Mediterranean; it is about commitment. We must say "yes" to the creation of a democratic, viable and peaceful Palestinian State that lives in peace and security with the State of Israel; "yes" to full support for President Mahmoud Abbas; "yes" to ending the violence and terror against Israel; "yes" to reactivating the Madrid Process, which began 15 years ago; "yes" to a global peace that includes Syria and Lebanon; and, finally, "yes" to an end to this tragedy.

The only possible way to find a solution is political and diplomatic action, not military action. We must rebuild a dynamic of negotiation to permanently eradicate violence from this region, which is bleeding to death as a result of misunderstanding and pain.

My Government hopes that all actors involved in the region commit themselves to implementing resolution 1701 (2006) and to the tasks in southern Lebanon that have been entrusted to the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon, in which Spanish troops are participating. We must give peace and dialogue another chance.

From the eastern Mediterranean, I now turn to the western Mediterranean. Spain pays particular attention to its neighbourly relations with the Maghreb, a region with regard to which we maintain an active and comprehensive policy that strengthens our friendship and cooperation. That is why we attach importance to the relaunching of the process of building a united Maghreb.

To accelerate the pace of that project, we will need to find a negotiated and effective solution to the conflict in Western Sahara, which has lasted for more than 30 years and urgently calls for an atmosphere conducive to breaking the current deadlock. The international community must create such an atmosphere to ensure a just and lasting political agreement that respects the principle of self-determination, within the United Nations framework.

The will to engage in dialogue and compromise could clear up this old conflict, as was the case with Gibraltar. I am pleased to inform the Assembly that the Tripartite Forum of Dialogue on Gibraltar, which met last Monday in Cordoba, has already adopted its first agreements, which reflect the spirit of the relevant United Nations resolutions. Those agreements in no way mean that my Government renounces its sovereignty over Gibraltar.

Relations with Ibero-America are a constant priority of the Government of Spain in its foreign policy. We are committed to promoting the cohesion, growth and visibility of the Ibero-American community, with which we maintain historic ties and share new strategies and objectives. The Ibero-American Secretariat, which is participating here for the first time as an observer, strengthens our community through dialogue and coordination. The forthcoming summit to be held in Uruguay will assess ongoing activities and propose measures to begin anew the social, economic, cultural and political progress demanded by the civil societies of the Ibero-American community.

The President returned to the Chair.

Cooperation and understanding also guide our trans-Atlantic relations and, in a very special way, our relations with the United States. In a constructive spirit, we discuss concerns and long-term projects that strengthen the international community.

As multilateral actors, we know that many of our difficulties and problems will not be resolved through voluntarism or national action. Our action must be on a global scale if we are to effectively address them in all their complexity — particularly the new challenges facing the international community that hinder the promotion of a more just and equitable globalization.

A sense of political responsibility leads us to resolve urgent global problems such as security and terrorism, to fight hunger and poverty and to manage migratory flows. Through the coordination of the United Nations, the world must promote the causes of sustainable development, security and human rights. We cannot have security without development, there can be no development without security, and we will not attain those objectives if human rights are not respected.

We cannot accept terrorism, regardless of its origin. Our acceptance would transform it into terror and would unleash a spiral of fear in which freedoms would suffer. We must not let down our guard against terrorism; neither must we let down our guard against the erosion of freedoms. The Government of Spain welcomes the adoption of the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, which does not overlook victims and their families.

Situations of extreme poverty and humanitarian catastrophes are inconceivable at the beginning of the twenty-first century. We must deepen our sincere commitment to the Millennium Development Goals and to the fight against hunger and poverty in order to alleviate the uncertainty, hardship and despair that affect millions of citizens throughout the world.

The traditional areas of Spanish action have been broadened and reinforced through the progressive consolidation of an advanced cooperation policy. Spain has increased the quality and quantity of its Official Development Assistance (ODA), which will reach 0.5 per cent of our gross domestic product (GDP) in 2008. Spain's contribution to international organizations and trust funds has increased this year by more than 400 per cent.

Spain's development aid has been expanded in the Mediterranean countries and the African continent, where planning has played an important role. The plan for Africa has required a major effort of cooperation and commitment to deal with dramatic situations of poverty and sickness, which jeopardize the well-being of African societies.

Future programs, such as the one proposed by President Wade of Senegal, merit all our consideration and support. Poverty has brought us a new global challenge, namely, the management of migration flows, since hunger and need know no borders. Inequalities in the distribution of wealth, unemployment, the lack of future prospects, political instability, inadequate respect for human rights and intolerable life conditions push more than 200 million people in the whole world to migrate. The demographic impacts of these flows are perceived not just in countries of origin, but also those of transit and destination. Therefore, immigration is one of the greatest challenges of the twenty-first century and Spain is on the frontline. We must confront it in all its aspects, both internal and external, with measures for development assistance and border controls.

Migrations, exchanges and communications technologies have given birth to a multicultural society that is not without tensions. This emerging reality stimulates the appearance of challenges that demand a critical analysis in order to build solid bridges between East and West.

The initiative of the Alliance of Civilizations, sponsored by Spain and Turkey, belongs today to the international community and the United Nations and seeks to provide answers to these challenges. The management of cultural relations can only be achieved from the perspective of security, education, promotion of culture and interreligious dialogue. This respect amongst the different cultures and creeds must encourage the reduction of frictions that could inspire violence and terror. The cartoon crisis and the effects and wrong interpretations of the words of His Holiness the Pope urgently demand the implementation of the Alliance of Civilizations.

The twenty-first century will be the time when we are called upon to resolve old conflicts and confront new global challenges effectively. For that, a reform is needed in the United Nations. The Government of Spain is satisfied with the reform process in the areas

of peace and security, development and human rights. The Peacebuilding Commission, the Human Rights Council, the United Nations Democracy Fund, the Global Strategy against Terrorism and the Central Emergency Relief Fund are new instruments that have a bearing on the challenges facing the international community.

Allow me to conclude with a few verses of the universal Spanish poet Federico Garcia Lorca, from his book "Poet in New York",

"If hope is extinguished and the Babel of incomprehension begins, what torch will light the paths of the Earth?"

Let us not give up the dream of peace. Let us work together to achieve it.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now call on His Excellency Mr. Ahmed Aboul Gheit, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Egypt.

Mr. Aboul Gheit (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): Madam President, allow me today to pay a special tribute to Mr. Kofi Annan, the Secretary-General of our Organization, for the important role he has played over the past ten years in upholding the lofty principles and values on which this Organization was founded. During the same period, Mr. Annan dealt with many trying international situations with profound wisdom and clear vision. It is our hope that the candidate elected for this important international post during this session will display the same wisdom and vision.

The sixty-first session meets against the backdrop of a complex international situation and unfortunate international events that have uncovered many contradictions in the work of this Organization. Those contradictions require us to study in depth the extent to which the United Nations has succeeded in strengthening international understanding and consensus when dealing with the threats and challenges that face humanity. The current complex situation and recent events make it incumbent upon us to draw on past experience to strengthen the role of the Organization in achieving the noble purposes and principles for which it was founded.

The negotiations preceding the adoption of the 2005 Summit Outcome Document and the subsequent negotiations on its implementation have made it clear that the visions of the North and the South with regard to the future of the United Nations and the nature of its

role in the current and coming phases have become more divergent than before. That was manifest in a number of attitudes that have left visible marks on the international environment.

There is a widening gap between, on the one hand, those who pay the larger share of the budget of the Organization and believe that their contributions entitle them to a larger say in the conduct of its work, and on the other hand the developing countries, which pay their fair share as established by the methodology and criteria adopted by the General Assembly and believe that the Organization must remain the international forum of democracy, equality and good governance on the international level, as embodied in the principle of "one State, one vote".

Some States, with increasing insistence, believe that the Security Council must hold the fate of the Organization in its hands, taking precedence over its other main organs. Those States are robbing the others of most of their competencies and deal with them in any way they see fit, without oversight, even if that leads to the failure of the Council to discharge its responsibilities to prevent the killing of the innocent or the perpetration of crimes of genocide and other crimes against humanity.

This insistence by a small number of States runs counter to the view of the majority of Member States, which believe that the General Assembly is the inclusive democratic forum that brings the Members of the Organization together. It is the Assembly that mandated the Council to bear the responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security. The Assembly alone has the right of oversight and review of the work of all the organs of the Organization. Indeed, the Assembly has the right to withdraw the prerogatives of the Security Council, should it fail to discharge its charter-mandated responsibilities or if the narrow political interests of one of the parties to a conflict prevent the Council from fulfilling its task.

This is a time when the international arena has witnessed a growing tendency to misuse official development assistance (ODA) by imposing conditions on the national priorities of developing countries without any regard to the agreements reached in the relevant United Nations conferences and summits. At the same time, the overwhelming majority continues to believe that development is a human right and that

development assistance, along with the transfer of technology, is an obligation for developed countries.

Last year was the sixtieth anniversary of the tragedies of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Astonishingly, some States continue to believe that their might and dominance are based on their — and their allies' — continued possession of nuclear arsenals. These States believe in the need to exercise strict control and supervision of other States and to apply restrictions on the use of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes. At the same time, the great majority of Member States believe that their commitment under the Treaty on the Non-proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) not to produce nuclear weapons was made on the basis of a corresponding commitment by the nuclear-weapons States to eliminate nuclear weapons under international supervision within a specific time frame and to achieve the universality of the Treaty. Not only does the maintenance of the existing nuclear arsenals jeopardize the credibility of the NPT, it also threatens humanity with total destruction and annihilation.

Our peoples have a keen interest in the achievement of a larger measure of democracy, human rights and political reform. However, we now can see that some seek to impose these concepts by military force, based on their assumption that their principles, values and cultures are superior and stronger and thus worthy of being imposed on others. At the same time, the overwhelming majority believe that democracy and human rights are based on culture-specific values and standards that emanate from their respective societies. They simply cannot be imposed from outside.

Notwithstanding the increase in the number of victims of terrorist operations, there is an increased tendency to deal with terrorism through military force alone, while ignoring its root causes. Some have made it their mission to rid the world of the evils of terrorism as they themselves define it. They ignore the international collective work to conclude a comprehensive convention on terrorism and to implement effectively the General Assembly Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy in a manner that strikes a balance between the respective roles of the General Assembly and the Security Council.

Last, but not least, the negotiations on the reform of the Organization have proven that some believe that the international collective security regime was established to enable those who possess the military

might to impose political settlements under international protection. While the great majority believes that the lessons of history, most recently in Lebanon, have proven that military might cannot and will not impose a political settlement. Such settlements must be reached through negotiations alone.

The aforementioned are some of the main elements that set our positions farther apart during the past year. We must take these elements as a basis for determining the premise of our work during this session. We must develop a clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the performance of our Organization. Together, we should chart the course aimed at upholding the values of democracy, justice and respect for law in international relations. We must move resolutely towards the consolidation of those values in the international community, in view of the fact that they constitute the real, solid foundations of international peace and security.

With the same constructive spirit that prevailed in our work last year, together with a balanced mixture of realism and ambition, and without the imposition of impractical time frames or the acceptance of temporary measures, we must proceed towards the achievement of further reform and the strengthening of the effectiveness of the United Nations. We must commit to preserving both the principle of consensus and the intergovernmental character of the Organization.

Together, we must work to increase the ability of the collective security regime to deal swiftly with international problems. We must stand up to the arrogance of power of some so that we can protect the rights and future of other countries and peoples. We must also face resolutely any attempts to impose temporary solutions through unilateral actions or military solutions that might result in transient victories that lack justice and a comprehensive vision. Such actions only scratch the surface of the problems without delving into the root causes. They lead to the exacerbation of problems by fanning the flames of hatred and rejection. This, in turn, feeds terrorism and extremism and leads those who despair of the justice of the international system to rebel against the will of the international community.

Despite Egypt's repeated warnings against following the path of escalation and confrontation, the huge loss of life and property incurred as a result of the war between Israel and Lebanon has gone beyond all

limits. Lebanon has suffered the total devastation of its infrastructure and the indiscriminate killing of hundreds of innocent civilians, including children, as the result of actions that contravene the United Nations Charter and the basic rules of international law and relevant international humanitarian law. And, despite the fact that the Israeli war against Lebanon caused untold devastation, it has proven that military might, however great, will never be able to impose a political solution. It has also proven that the solution lies in ending the occupation and in negotiating a just political settlement that will eliminate the feelings of enmity and replace them with relations of cooperation and peaceful coexistence.

Undoubtedly, Security Council resolution 1701 (2006), after having been amended to take into consideration the Arab point of view, thanks to the efforts of the Arab delegation mandated by the League of Arab States to New York, is a step in the right direction. However, this step will remain incomplete and will not enjoy the success required unless it deals with the core of the problem in the region — namely, the Arab Israeli conflict.

The Arab-Israeli conflict has squandered the resources and lives of the people of the Middle East for many decades. In it, political, historical and religious dimensions have fermented into a combustible mix that carries the seeds of a conflagration that could go beyond the region and reflect negatively on stability and relations between the various cultures and faiths in the world. Hence the importance for all of us, citizens of the region and members of the international community, to act in concert to reach an immediate, just and comprehensive solution to this conflict.

In its endeavours to achieve comprehensive peace between the Arab world and Israel, Egypt precedes from a realistic vision of the events on the ground. In this context, Egypt is exerting efforts to improve the security situation between the Palestinians and the Israelis through direct engagement with both parties, with the aim of calming the situation, putting an end to all acts of violence, killing and destruction and encouraging confidence-building measures between the Palestinians and the Israelis aimed at resuming dialogue and negotiations. At the same time, Egypt seeks to resume progress on the three tracks of the settlement of the Arab Israeli conflict. This is the main objective of the peace process, which has regrettably been stalled for years. The deterioration in the security

situation must not make us lose sight of that objective. Experience has proven time and again that the success of security measures will remain limited and fragile if they are not made part of a wider political framework that would ensure the basic rights of the parties and encourage them to make the difficult decisions necessary for the improvement of the security situation.

The Quartet has drawn up a road map for peace. It was accepted by the parties and the States of the region. It was endorsed by resolution 1515 (2003) of the Security Council. It was hoped that it would constitute the political framework to which I referred earlier. However, this did not happen, for reasons that I will not list here. Yet, the road map remains a cornerstone for the achievement of peace in the region, since it establishes the principles of peaceful co-existence between Israel and Palestine and determines the general parameters of the final settlement between Israel, Palestine, Syria and Lebanon — namely, an end to the occupation that started in 1967, implementation of the international resolutions on the Arab-Israeli conflict, and implementation of the Arab peace initiative that would ensure security, peace and recognition for Israel by its Arab neighbours in return for Israel's ending its occupation of the Arab territories and working out acceptable solutions for other pending issues. There is now a need to build upon this cornerstone in order to create an effective political framework that would move the parties towards the objective desired by the international community as a whole — namely, the establishment of a comprehensive peace that would put an end to occupation and strife in this part of the world.

Egypt has closely followed the developments in the Darfur crisis since its inception. It is one of the troop-contributing countries to the African Union observer mission in Darfur. Egypt participated actively in the Abuja talks and has provided humanitarian assistance to the people of Darfur.

There is no doubt that the international community bears a major share of the responsibility for reaching a swift and just solution to that problem. In our opinion, efforts must focus on creating conditions conducive to the success of the Darfur Peace Agreement as the political framework agreed upon by the main parties. That will require the launching and strengthening of the Darfur-Darfur dialogue in order to create a consensus on the Peace Agreement and to

convince the parties that have not yet signed it to do so. In addition, there is a need to encourage the Sudanese Government to carry out its commitments on the development and reconstruction of the Darfur region.

If the United Nations is to continue to play the role entrusted to it, we must display a sense of collective responsibility based on a strong resolve to make the Organization an inclusive framework for common international efforts to deal promptly and effectively with regional and global issues and problems. The call to disseminate democratic practices and good governance among the States of the world will be heeded only if coupled with the clear commitment of all States to applying those concepts in a multilateral framework and at the international level. It will be valid only if accompanied by a reaffirmation of the principles of partnership, the sharing of burdens and responsibilities, equality of rights and duties, and, above all, participation on an equal footing in defining options and in decision-making at the international level.

Let us work together to strengthen the principles of democracy in an international multilateral setting. Let us make dialogue and mutual respect the language of our discourse. Let us give lofty human ideals and the common good precedence over narrow selfish interests. Let us cast aside our differences and be real partners.

In conclusion, allow me to convey our sincere congratulations to you, Madam, on your assumption of the presidency of the General Assembly at its sixty-first session. We are confident that, as the first Arab woman to assume that high position, you will meet with resounding success. In that respect, allow us also to express our sincere appreciation and gratitude to your predecessor, Mr. Jan Eliasson, President of the General Assembly at its sixtieth session, for his skilful leadership of our work.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now call on His Excellency Mr. Moctar Ouane, Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Mali.

Mr. Ouane (Mali) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, it is my great pleasure to express to you, Madam, the heartfelt congratulations of the delegation of Mali on your outstanding election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its sixty-first session. Your election attests to your eminent personal qualities and is a tribute to your country, Bahrain, with which Mali

enjoys fruitful cooperation. I assure you and other Bureau members, whom I also congratulate, of the support of my delegation.

I should also like to express our satisfaction to your predecessor, Mr. Jan Eliasson, for his excellent guidance of the work of the General Assembly at its sixtieth session. History will recall his spirit of initiative and his commitment, which were decisive to the implementation of the outcomes of the September 2005 World Summit.

I should also like to pay tribute to Secretary-General Kofi Annan, who, throughout his two terms, has carried out his mission with devotion and commitment.

Tomorrow, Mali will celebrate the 46th anniversary of its independence, but Mali is an ancient country, a country of traditions, a crossroads of civilization, a land of culture, dialogue and tolerance. Under the leadership of President Amadou Toumani Touré, our country continues every day to consolidate its model of democracy, which has been unanimously hailed in Africa and throughout the world. A new Mali — a democratic, united Mali — is on the march.

A symbol of that dynamic was the signing in Algiers on 4 July of the accord for the restoration of peace, security and development in the Kidal region. The Algiers agreement bolsters Mali's firm resolve to opt for the peaceful settlement of disputes, fruitful dialogue and concerted action. The restoration of peace in the northern part of our country has allowed the various components of the Malian nation to work together in building our nation in a spirit of solidarity focused on the well-being and prosperity of all.

Similarly, our political system is being strengthened daily in a context of peaceful democracy, to the great satisfaction of our people, who have made the irreversible decision that any devolution of power must occur within a democratic and constitutional framework. To that end, in the first quarter of 2007 the people of Mali will be called to the polls — for the fourth time since the establishment of multiparty democracy in 1992 — to elect a president and renew the mandate of the deputies to the National Assembly.

Mali welcomes the choice of theme for the sixty-first session of the General Assembly on implementing a global partnership for development. In that respect, it goes without saying that the 2005 World Summit

represented a decisive moment in the international community's determination to ensure a better life for all the peoples of the world. At that time, our heads of State and Government reviewed the implementation of the internationally agreed development objectives, in particular the Millennium Development Goals, and reaffirmed their relevance, thereby confirming their importance at the heart of the development agenda.

In that regard, Mali has made the fight against poverty a priority of the Government's actions. In May 2002, my country adopted a strategic framework for the fight against poverty, which sets priority development guidelines, particularly in the social spheres, in order to better meet the basic needs of our people by creating an environment conducive to sustained growth, enhanced participatory democracy, good governance and entrenched rule of law.

With respect to results achieved, the Government of Mali, with the assistance of its partners, is finalizing a new so-called second-generation strategic framework that will encompass, above and beyond the social sectors, the productive sectors of agriculture, industry and trade. In the same vein, we recently adopted a law on agricultural guidelines that makes agriculture the driving force of the national economy in order to guarantee food self-sufficiency and to ensure the well-being of our people.

Mr. Chungong-Ayafor (Cameroon), Vice-President, took the Chair.

Security cannot be ensured in an environment in which the movement of small arms and light weapons continues to destroy human lives, destabilize States and impede their economic and social development. In accordance with the United Nations Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects, we are firmly committed to mitigating the unspeakable suffering caused by those weapons and to ensuring individual security for all.

In that regard, in West Africa and in the context of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), we have taken significant measures to stem the scourge of the proliferation of light weapons. Indeed, the thirtieth conference of ECOWAS heads of State and Government, held at Abuja on 14 June, decided to back up the ECOWAS moratorium on the import, export and production of small arms and light weapons with executive power by converting it into a

binding convention. That new instrument should contribute to building the capacities of Governments to exert stricter control over the traffic in small arms and to improve security arrangements within the Community.

Similarly, we cannot fail to welcome the launching, in Bamako on 6 June, of the new ECOWAS Small Arms Control Programme (ECOSAP). Over the course of six years, ECOSAP — via the intermediary of national commissions — will not only provide member States with technical and financial support, but will also contribute to building the capacities of a special unit in the ECOWAS Executive Secretariat.

On the other hand, we can only regret the fact that the United Nations Conference to review the implementation of the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects failed to draft an agreed text because of the lack of progress in the priority areas of the bearing of arms by civilians, the management of stockpiles, references to human rights and the participation of civil society. As a result, we have fallen far behind in the Programme, the provisions of which we were supposed to improve. For its part, Mali reiterates its readiness to continue to work with other Member States to make progress on that important issue.

Rarely have international peace and security been put to such a harsh test by the resurgence of hotbeds of tension and conflict and acts of international terrorism. International terrorism is, as we all know, one of the most serious threats to international peace and security. In that respect, the attacks perpetrated worldwide vividly remind us that no country is safe from that phenomenon.

In order to create conditions conducive to responding to terrorism, it is urgent that we build national and regional capacities. To that end, we must overcome our differences in drafting a consensus definition and adopting a comprehensive strategy in that area. No cause, howsoever just or right, justifies the deliberate use of violence against innocent civilians. In that vein, we must promote a dialogue among civilizations, which remains fully relevant in an international context marked by a lack of trust among nations in terms of culture and religion.

The maintenance of international peace and security is a prerequisite of any development process.

Mali therefore continues to be fully committed to the ideals of peace and stability, both within and beyond its borders.

On the African front, I welcome the progress made towards reconstruction and national reconciliation in many countries, including Guinea-Bissau, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Burundi and the Comoros. In Côte d'Ivoire, despite the clear lack of progress in the implementation of the road map, the peace process has reached a critical phase. Mali reaffirms its readiness to assist the Ivorian political actors in restoring lasting peace in that brotherly neighbour country.

In the Sudan, the implementation of the Darfur Peace Agreement, signed on 5 May in Abuja, is a major concern of the international community. We urge all parties involved to fulfil their commitments and to work to restore peace and preserve national unity.

In the same vein, we can only welcome the successful convening of the first general, free, multiparty elections to complete the process of democratic transition in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

The recent outbreak of violence in the Middle East recalls — as if there were any need to do so — the necessity for the international community to take appropriate measures to create conditions conducive to a lasting, negotiated and peaceful settlement to that crisis. While reaffirming our active solidarity with the people of Lebanon and Palestine, we are closely following developments in that region and will continue to support relevant United Nations resolutions on the Middle East and the Palestinian question.

While it is now recognized that trade is a factor for growth and development, we must also note that developing countries continue to suffer the repercussions of an unfair and discriminatory trade system, particularly given the tariff and non-tariff obstacles and subsidies for production and export that distort competition. Given their negative effects, such measures prevent the development of our agriculture, deny our producers — Malian cotton growers among them — a decent income, and keep them in the poverty that we have committed ourselves to eradicating by 2015.

In that regard, the hopes placed in the Doha Development Round contrast starkly with the major

uncertainties arising from the recent failure of the trade talks on agricultural products. That is a source of legitimate concern to us. Mali urges all parties to be flexible and promptly to relaunch the Doha Round to ensure that trade liberalization serves the development of all nations without exception, particularly the poorest, so that we may raise millions of people out of poverty.

The issue of external debt is of particular importance to developing countries, especially the least developed. Indeed, despite the welcome measures to cancel the multilateral debt of certain countries, including Mali, the debt burden continues to weigh heavily on developing countries, undermine their development efforts and prevent their economic recovery. Those countries are locked in a cycle of dependence on outside financing and, if nothing is done, will fall behind in their efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals.

In such circumstances, we need to explore lasting solutions for making the debt less burdensome, including the cancellation of bilateral debt. Those countries need investment and to strive for the well-being of their peoples. There must also be accelerated progress towards a substantial increase in official development assistance if the ultimate goal of 0.7 per cent of the gross national income of the developed countries is to be reached.

The AIDS pandemic has spread so alarmingly that, beyond its health dimensions and given its vast reach, it has today become a development problem throughout the world. Indeed, in Africa it has become a health emergency, despite our national and international efforts. In the face of the pandemic, we need to step up our efforts and strengthen our resolve fully to implement the 2001 Declaration of Commitment and the General Assembly's Political Declaration issued at the High-level Meeting on HIV/AIDS in May and June this year. The XVI International AIDS Conference, held at Toronto in August 2006, it should be recalled, has highlighted the seriousness of the situation and the urgent need to take action.

At the national level, Mali has established a multisectoral programme for combating HIV/AIDS, whose implementation has made it possible to provide free access to antiretroviral treatment for patients and to carry out an awareness and education prevention

campaign to stem the disease and its disastrous social effects. In the same vein, the Government has created a National High Council against AIDS under the direct authority of the President. I would like to take this opportunity to stress that the international community must continue to give the same priority to other diseases, such as malaria, tuberculosis and polio, whose consequences are just as devastating for our people as AIDS.

As for the situation of the disabled, Mali is pleased to have been a member of the working group that prepared the text that was the basis for a draft Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. We welcome the negotiations under way within the Ad Hoc Committee, and we remain convinced that such a tool will create the framework for equality and the full participation of the disabled in efforts to build their respective societies.

As for the institutional reform of the United Nations, Mali welcomes the creation of the Peacebuilding Commission, one of the major results of the Summit of September 2005. For many years the management of post-conflict situations has been the weak link of our Organization. As is known, the impulse that gives rise to peacekeeping, for both donor countries and troop contributors, subsides once there is a semblance of stability. As a result, such situations quite often result in a resurgence of conflicts less than five years after they have ended, as we have seen from experience in this area.

How can we not welcome the creation and implementation of the Human Rights Council, of which Mali is a member, the Central Emergency Response Fund and the adoption of a series of resolutions on the follow-up to development? All those measures work together for the attainment of the wishes of the world's leaders to address better the problems and the challenges of our time in order to bring changes in the priority areas of development, peace, collective security, human rights and reform of the Organization.

The progress achieved must not cause us to forget that much remains to be done, especially the necessary reform of the Security Council. While that need is unanimously accepted, it is no less true that not one of the formulas proposed has so far won consensus.

Mali, drawing on the Ezulwini Consensus and the Syrté Declaration adopted by the heads of State and

Government of the African Union, strongly supports Africa's claim to two permanent seats and five non-permanent seats. A Council thus reformed would better reflect the geopolitical realities of today's world and would redress the historical injustice done to Africa, the only region without a permanent seat on the Security Council.

I would like to end by recalling that millions of persons in the world have placed their hopes for peace, security, development and solidarity in the United Nations. We have no right to disappoint them. As the community of nations, we have the obligation and the means to achieve all that through collective awareness and protection of our common values. This is what it will take for us to be in a position to guarantee future generations sustainable development that will protect them from the scourge of war.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency Ms. Aïchatou Mindaoudou, Minister for Foreign Affairs, Cooperation and African Integration of the Republic of Niger.

Ms. Mindaoudou (Niger) (spoke in French): Allow me to express the warmest congratulations of the delegation of Niger to Ms. Al-Khalifa upon her election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its sixty-first session. She is the third woman in the history of the United Nations called upon to take up this office, and her election is richly symbolic on several counts. In her we have a seasoned diplomat of great competence and sure qualities that augur well for the positive results that we will see under her presidency.

We also congratulate her predecessor, Mr. Jan Eliasson, President of the Assembly at its sixtieth session, for the remarkable work he accomplished during his presidency.

Finally, allow me to reiterate the congratulations of the Republic of Niger to the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, who will be leaving the Organization after ten years of intense activity, ingenious initiatives and staunch devotion. There can be no doubt that the vigour he brought to the Organization, the important reforms he launched and the new bodies that have been created during his mandate stand out in the annals of the United Nations.

More than ever before, the international community is confronted by challenges to peace and

security. Despite noteworthy progress in this area and despite multiple efforts, horror and despair continue to reach us from certain areas of conflict.

Some positive developments have certainly been recorded in Africa in the area of conflict resolution, notably in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Burundi, Liberia and Sierra Leone. Those developments remind us that we need an operational and effective decision-making mechanism so that we can quickly deal with any threat to international peace and security, irrespective of its complexity. Only substantial reform of the Security Council, along with revitalization of the General Assembly, can enhance legitimacy and effectiveness, especially if it takes into account equitable representation accompanied by an improvement in working methods. For Niger, only equitable enlargement of the Security Council can improve its functioning and make it possible to establish the bases for decisions that will be acceptable to and accepted by everyone.

In Côte d'Ivoire, the United Nations must redouble its efforts to reach a definition of a new transition in consultation with all parties, ECOWAS and the African Union so that the matter can be dealt with calmly after 31 October 2006.

The situation in the Middle East — especially in Lebanon, which has held the attention of the international community over recent weeks — proves, if proof were needed, that the United Nations is still the prime forum for promoting negotiations on preserving international peace and security.

The same degree of attention should be paid to the resurgence of the Israeli-Palestinian crisis. The establishment of a comprehensive peace in the subregion involves going back to the negotiating table in order to make progress in implementing the road map towards the creation of a sovereign and viable Palestinian State, in conformity with the relevant resolutions of the United Nations.

With regard to Western Sahara, the United Nations must pursue and intensify its efforts with a view to finding a definitive solution to the question. As to Jammu and Kashmir, the Niger encourages India and Pakistan to continue with their talks.

Another serious threat to international peace and security is posed by nuclear weapons. In this regard, the Niger would like to reaffirm its support for the

commitments made within the framework of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), while recognizing the importance and the usefulness of research for peaceful purposes. However, the increasingly marked division which this issue engenders requires an appropriate response in the ongoing quest for consensus through the current negotiations.

The Niger welcomes the establishment of the Peacebuilding Commission, which is one of the first concrete achievements to emerge from the World Summit. We should give it our full support so that it can provide effective assistance to countries in post-conflict situations. In my capacity as a representative of the country currently holding the chairmanship of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), a region which is still ravaged by conflicts, I am happy to report on the progress that has been made in our subregion in the area of conflict prevention and resolution. Sierra Leone, Liberia and Guinea-Bissau, which I referred to just now, today are countries in a post-conflict situation. They therefore need to be effectively helped in order to consolidate their return to peace and to create the conditions for an environment that is favourable to their economic and social development. In order to maintain the ban on the circulation of illegal weapons, which, as every one knows, have stoked many conflicts in our subregion, the heads of State and Government of the member countries of ECOWAS have decided to convert the moratorium on small arms and light weapons into a legally binding convention, in order to strengthen the capacity of Member States to fight effectively against this scourge.

The Niger also welcomes the establishment of the new Human Rights Council. This body merits the approval and backing of all Member States, which should fully cooperate with it. For its part, the Niger undertakes to do everything in its power to participate effectively in its activities.

In another area, the United Nations Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) will certainly help us to exercise greater control over such scourges as food insecurity and cyclical droughts, which have caused so much damage and have plunged a substantial portion of the populations of some West African countries into an unacceptably precarious situation owing to the slow reaction of the international community. For the Niger, as well as for other

countries of the subregion, the human development index would have been higher if development cooperation had seen qualitative and quantitative increases in line with the commitments contained in the Monterrey Consensus with regard to official development assistance (ODA) and other initiatives on the subject.

The debates at the current session are particularly important for the Niger because they come one year after the historic Summit of 2005. The High-level Plenary Meeting which prepared the above Summit already stressed the importance of partnerships, particularly with respect to achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). In this regard, the central theme of the sixty-first session, namely, the implementation of a global partnership for development, is very appropriate because it illustrates perfectly the need and the importance of a multilateral and collective approach in order to find the most appropriate solutions to the current problems in the world.

I would like here, on behalf of the Niger, to commend the initiatives taken to find new sources of funding in order to provide an initial response to the insufficiency of resources noted during the evaluation of the 2005 Summit. I would particularly like to welcome the International Drug Purchase Facility (UNITAID) initiative launched by the French Government to finance the fight against AIDS and malaria. The Niger is one of the first 17 countries to have endorsed the tax on airline tickets.

It is also within the framework of this kind of partnership that the positive nature of international migration could be stressed and could be included in our search for appropriate responses, which would take into account the concerns of the countries of origin, transit and destination.

I would like to end my statement by pointing out that, for the Niger, the effective implementation of the actions planned to deal with global issues must be multilateral in character and must assign a central role to the United Nations system.

And here I would reiterate the faith that the Niger has in the United Nations, not only because the Organization remains the most appropriate framework and the most relevant multilateral mechanism with which to promote development, but also because it pursues the noble causes which it embodies. The

United Nations therefore must be revitalized in order to be in a position to satisfy the deepest aspirations of the peoples and nations of the world, particularly those that are weakest.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to Mr. João Bernardo de Miranda, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Angola.

Mr. Miranda (Angola) (*spoke in Portuguese; English text provided by the delegation*): On behalf of my Government, I wish to congratulate Ms. Al-Khalifa on her election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its sixty-first session. We are confident that under her guidance and leadership, this session will be productive and will attain the goals set. I assure her of my delegation's full cooperation.

I would also like to take this opportunity to express my country's appreciation to the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, for the valuable work he has performed during the 10 years of his mandate, which is now drawing to a close.

Mr. Annan has made an indelible mark on the history of the United Nations by paying special attention to the most pertinent problems affecting our planet, especially the African continent. In particular, Angola praises the role which Mr. Annan has played during the most critical phase of the Organization's history. I trust that the next Secretary-General will find in Mr. Kofi Annan's legacy an impressive reference for the reinforcement of the Organization's capacity to deal with the principal problems facing humanity.

The aspirations to stability, security and social justice of the peoples represented in this Assembly continue to be unfulfilled. The persisting armed violence in some States and the meagre results in the fight against world poverty have been contributing to this picture; consequently, these make up the chief challenges facing the United Nations.

With regard to the new tendencies towards violence, we see something new. It is more indiscriminate; it emerges not only from inter-State or internal conflicts, but rather, and increasingly, it arises from actions that seek to alter the way of life of societies through intimidation and the brutal destruction of human lives.

In recent times alone, over a dozen countries in four continents have been severely affected by acts of terror, which have become the most direct and

immediate threat to international peace and security. In spite of political or ideological differences, the international community has, in general terms, demonstrated firmness and unity in the fight against acts of terror. We are of the view that this form of collective action must continue to be the most appropriate way of dealing with threats to international security, including terrorism.

Poverty indexes around the world are also a contributing factor to the bleak present-day international situation. Half of the world's population, or three billion people, continue to live on less than two dollars a day; 640 million people are without appropriate housing; 400 million people do not have access to drinking water; and 270 million people lack medical assistance. Close to one billion people have entered the twenty-first century illiterate and with little hope of emerging from spiritual and material poverty.

Africa is the continent most affected by this scourge, and not even the potential for economic growth of some of our countries permits us to hope that the poverty indexes will be drastically reduced.

Notwithstanding this unwelcome picture, in recent times, we have seen significant progress in the area of peace and security, democracy and respect for human rights. For instance, the resolution through dialogue of the Angolan internal conflict, which was among the longest-running conflicts in Africa, constitutes one of the more significant success stories in this regard. Recently, the Angolan Government opted for the same path of dialogue and negotiation in order to extend the peace process to the territory of Cabinda, where some insecurity persisted.

The establishment of peace in Angola was the supreme objective of a sensible and principled political process led by President José Eduardo dos Santos, whose goals were: to liberate, together with some forces in our region, the people of southern Africa from the dominance of oppressor regimes; to settle the conflicts in Central Africa through negotiation; to extinguish the threat that some States represented to their neighbours; and, finally, to economically develop and integrate the region.

The fruits of this political endeavour are visible today: the people of the region, who before were under oppressive regimes, now live in freedom and have built democratic societies. With Angola's support, one State in Central Africa settled its internal conflict, and, once

free, its people took charge of their destiny and recovered their sense of peace and stability. Another State in Central Africa overthrew the dictatorship that had oppressed its people and had created a permanent focus of regional tension by acting as a source of instability for neighbouring countries. Today, the people of that country are engaged in building a new democratic society by means of transparent elections and national reconciliation.

Now that peace has been achieved, one of the fundamental objectives of the Government of Angola is the complete elimination of factors of conflict. We have prioritized the pursuit of political reforms with a view to the consolidation of a democratic regime and a righteous State, aware that these constitute prerequisites for the maintenance of peace, political stability, respect for citizens' rights and economic development. This is a serious commitment which my Government will not forsake, the main objective being the regular holding of elections.

The next electoral process is at an advanced stage of preparation, and voter registration will begin next November. My Government is creating all the necessary conditions to make the next elections transparent and credible, so that their results are accepted by all the parties, and so that they constitute a step on the road to prosperity. Therefore, the organization of the next elections is going ahead surely and firmly.

Other priorities are the reintegration of the displaced population, refugees and former combatants, as well as the rehabilitation of the economy and the reduction of poverty. These areas have registered important progress. In only four years of peace, roughly 4.5 million displaced persons and more than 400,000 refugees have been resettled. Nearly 200,000 former combatants and members of their families have been socially and productively reintegrated; and countless infrastructures that were destroyed by the conflict are also being rehabilitated.

The national economy is characterized by a solid macroeconomic stability resulting from a coherent monetary and budgetary policy. It is among the fastest-growing economies in the world. For 2006 and future years, we foresee continuous, vigorous economic growth, of the order of 20 per cent.

In social terms, the results over the last four years are also encouraging. Poverty has been reduced from

over 80 per cent to 56 per cent. With the ongoing implementation of poverty reduction programmes and substantial investment in capital goods, we foresee a gradual improvement of social well-being and employment indexes in the short term. The global advances which my country has achieved in four years of peace are evidence that its people can look to the new Angola with real hope. The international community can count on Angola as a dependable partner.

In the area of peace, important progress has been made in other parts of the African continent. The Democratic Republic of the Congo, a neighbour and brother of Angola, is steadily approaching a situation of normality, which is likely to contribute to the lessening of tensions in Central Africa and in the Great Lakes region. Recently, and for the first time in its history, the people of this country exercised their right to freely choose their legitimate representatives. Such an act marks a crucial stage in the process of democratic transition and the consolidation of internal stability. It was made possible by the support of the international community, particularly of Angola, which supplied \$30 million and some logistical means for the electoral process.

Angola has always stood by the Congolese people and always will. It contributed to the cessation of the internal conflict that devastated the country and is currently contributing to building the capacity of the Congolese institutions charged with maintaining internal peace, security and order. It is now up to the Congolese parties to demonstrate that they are truly committed to peace and democracy. We want to believe that they will not frustrate the expectations of their people and of the international community and that they will respect the verdict of the ballot box.

The situation in Côte d'Ivoire remains volatile. The Ivorian people continue to be the principal victims of a conflict that is jeopardizing the country's future. Angola associates itself with the efforts of the international community to reach a definitive and peaceful resolution of the conflict in that country.

In the Middle East, the continuing violence is rendering ineffective any blueprints for peace aimed at resolving the conflict between Israel and Palestine. Angola supports the right to existence of all States in the area as well as their right to live in peace with their neighbours. It is important to return to a process aimed

at the peaceful resolution of the conflict — a process based on the road map for peace — in order to arrive at a comprehensive solution leading to regional stabilization.

Angola hopes that the people of Iraq and of Afghanistan will be able, in the short term, to fulfil their aspirations to live free from violence and from tension, and that those countries will be respected as sovereign and genuine States.

In conclusion, we would like to reiterate our desire that the process of reform of the United Nations, mainly of the Security Council, be accelerated. The current composition of that organ is anachronistic and fails to reflect the contemporary structures of the international community.

In the context of United Nations reform, we wish to stress the importance of the recent creation of the Peacebuilding Commission and of the Human Rights Council. I would like in that respect to express my gratitude to all Members of the United Nations for the trust they placed in my country, which is to preside over the Peacebuilding Commission during its first years of existence.

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear a statement by His Excellency Mr. Mahmoud Abbas, Chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organization and President of the Palestinian Authority.

Mr. Abbas (Palestine) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like to start by congratulating Ms. Haya Rashed Al-Khalifa on her election to preside over this session and to wish her success in achieving the objectives of the United Nations, which are accepted by all nations of the world, which believe that the Organization was created to safeguard international peace, human rights, and the right of peoples to self-determination. Indeed, as President Woodrow Wilson said in his first inaugural address:

"Nowhere else in the world have noble men and women exhibited in more striking forms the beauty and the energy of sympathy and helpfulness and counsel in their efforts to rectify wrong, alleviate suffering, and set the weak in the way of strength and hope."

I hope, therefore, that this session will promote cooperation between nations and peoples in pursuit of their common interests, namely the principles

enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations, which form the basis for membership in this Organization.

We must commend highly the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, for the effective role he has played and the considerable efforts he has deployed, as well as for his wise leadership in enhancing the United Nations and reinvigorating its role. We also commend him in particular for his efforts in respect of the Arab-Israeli conflict, the core of which is the question of Palestine.

Only a few weeks ago, the fires of war stopped raging in Lebanon. Despite the gravity of the losses, the destruction and the tragedy, the international community expeditiously, effectively and successfully intervened to put an end to the war and to provide support to the people and the legitimate Government of Lebanon in order to safeguard its security and independence and to put an end to the era of wars on its land. I commend the role played by the international community, and I hope that that positive and effective intervention will be extended, politically and practically, so as to resolve the root causes of all the conflicts and wars that have plagued our region for many decades.

Indeed, I need not reconfirm the fact that, after the experiences of war and suffering that we have been through, unless the question of Palestine and that of the continuing occupation of Palestinian and Arab lands since 1967 is resolved, the elements of tension and conflagration will keep the conflict alive and leave the door wide open to all forms of violence, terrorism, regional confrontations and global crises.

It is unfortunate today to see that international plans and initiatives, foremost among them the road map, which was endorsed by the United Nations Security Council, have reached a state of stagnation, even regression. Calls for the resumption of negotiations are faced with preconditions. Despair and frustration thrive in the midst of the roar of the bulldozers that are preparing for the construction of illegal settlements, changes in the demographic nature of Jerusalem and erection of an apartheid separation wall inside our occupied land and between its various parts. They thrive on the continuation of the frightful siege, through military checkpoints that have turned our cities and provinces into reservations, on the continuous saga of killings and assassinations that have claimed hundreds of civilian lives, on the demolitions of homes and on the ongoing arrests of more than

8,000 Palestinians, including parliamentarians and cabinet ministers. Some of the detained have been languishing for three decades, and their release and freedom are still eagerly awaited by their families and their people.

Under such conditions, I can reasonably ask: how can the international community expect extremism to retreat or the waves of violence to ebb? How can we and all the forces of moderation and peace in our region forcefully intervene and convince our public opinion that there is hope on the horizon? Or that the option of dialogue, negotiation and international legitimacy — which is our strategic choice and the path which we relentlessly advocate and which we will never abandon — will be fruitful and has a real chance of success?

Living in the midst of this tragedy, I am not the only one who must answer this fundamental question. The whole international community, particularly influential Powers, is called upon to provide tangible evidence that it will support an unconditional resumption of negotiations and provide those negotiations with true international support to ensure their success through the cessation of settlement activity, collective punishment and separation walls. This would provide a positive atmosphere for relaunching the negotiations and reaching the objectives of a just peace based on a two-State solution, as called for by President George Bush of the United States of America. Such a solution must be based on international legitimacy, as stressed in the Arab Peace Initiative, through the establishment of the independent State of Palestine on the 4 June 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, and in reaching a just and agreed solution for the problem of the refugees — who constitute more than half of our Palestinian people — in accordance with United Nations General Assembly resolution 194 (III) of 11 December 1948.

Lately, we have heard from the Government of Israel that it will abandon its policy of unilateralism and one-sided actions. This is encouraging, provided that the alternative is not stagnation or the imposition of faits accomplis on the ground, but rather a return to the negotiating table and to reaching a comprehensive solution to all of the permanent status issues in order to ensure a secure future for our children and theirs.

Recently, in tandem with all the strands and persuasions of the Palestinian political spectrum, I have sought to establish a Government of national unity that is consistent with international and Arab legitimacy and that corresponds to the principles established by the Quartet. Based on our commitment to these criteria, I would like to reaffirm that any future Palestinian Government will commit to and abide by all the agreements that the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and the Palestinian National Authority have committed to in the past, particularly the letters of mutual recognition dated 9 September 1993 exchanged between the two late, great leaders, Yasser Arafat and Itzhak Rabin. These two letters contain the mutual recognition by Israel and the PLO, the renunciation of violence and the adoption of negotiations as the path towards reaching a permanent solution leading to the establishment of the independent State of Palestine alongside the State of Israel.

Any future Government will commit to imposing security and order, to ending the phenomenon of multiple militias, lack of discipline or chaos, and will commit to the rule of law, since this is primarily a national Palestinian need. The efforts that we have exerted are for the sole purpose of establishing national unity that has real substance in order to achieve national Palestinian consensus around our national objectives, which comply with international legitimacy and the Arab Peace Initiative and call for peaceful means for the realization of these objectives. When such a national consensus is reached and a new national unity Government has been established according to it, it must be viewed as a qualitative achievement — not a step backwards or a limited regression from the path to which we have always been determinedly committed — even in the face of the bleakest of conditions.

I would like to reiterate that negotiations with Israel have been and will remain under the jurisdiction and responsibility of the Palestine Liberation Organization, which I chair. The outcome of these negotiations will be presented to the Palestinian National Council, the highest Palestinian national body, or to a national public referendum.

What we have achieved in this regard should suffice to lift the unjust siege imposed on our people. That siege has inflicted extensive damage on our

society, our livelihood and the means to our growth and progress.

Madam President, I come to you bearing the wounds of a people who are bleeding on a daily basis. We are a people who seeks normal life, where our children can go safely to school, where children are born to live, not die; where youth can find honourable and decent work that provides them with a dignified path to a secure future so that they can be partners in formulating their history, rather than be victims to the cruelty of history; where women give birth in hospitals, not at the checkpoints of the occupation; where families gather in the evening to dream of a new day, a day without killing, imprisonment or arrest.

I simply want tomorrow to be better than today. I want my homeland, Palestine, to be a homeland, rather than a prison — independent and sovereign, like homelands of all other peoples of this world. I want Jerusalem to be the point of convergence for the dialogue of all prophets and the capital of two States living side by side in peace and equality.

Thirty-two years ago, from this rostrum, the late President Yasser Arafat issued his famous and resounding call: "Do not let the olive branch fall from my hand" (A/PV.2282, para. 82). I now reiterate that call. Do not let the olive branch fall from my hand. I repeat: do not let the olive branch fall from my hand.

The meeting rose at 8.40 p.m.